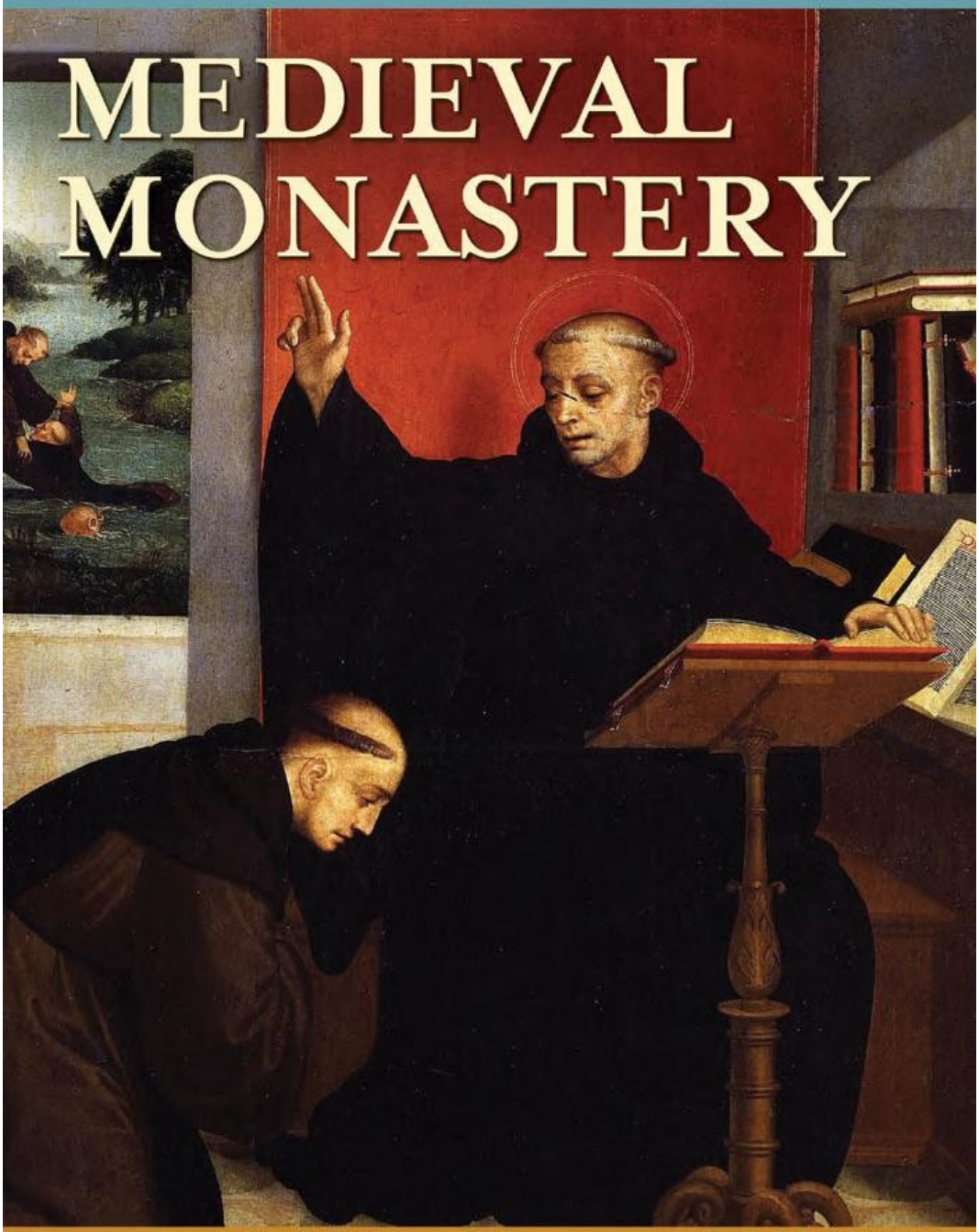
DAILY LIFE IN A

MEDIEVAL MONASTERY



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DAILY LIFE IN A

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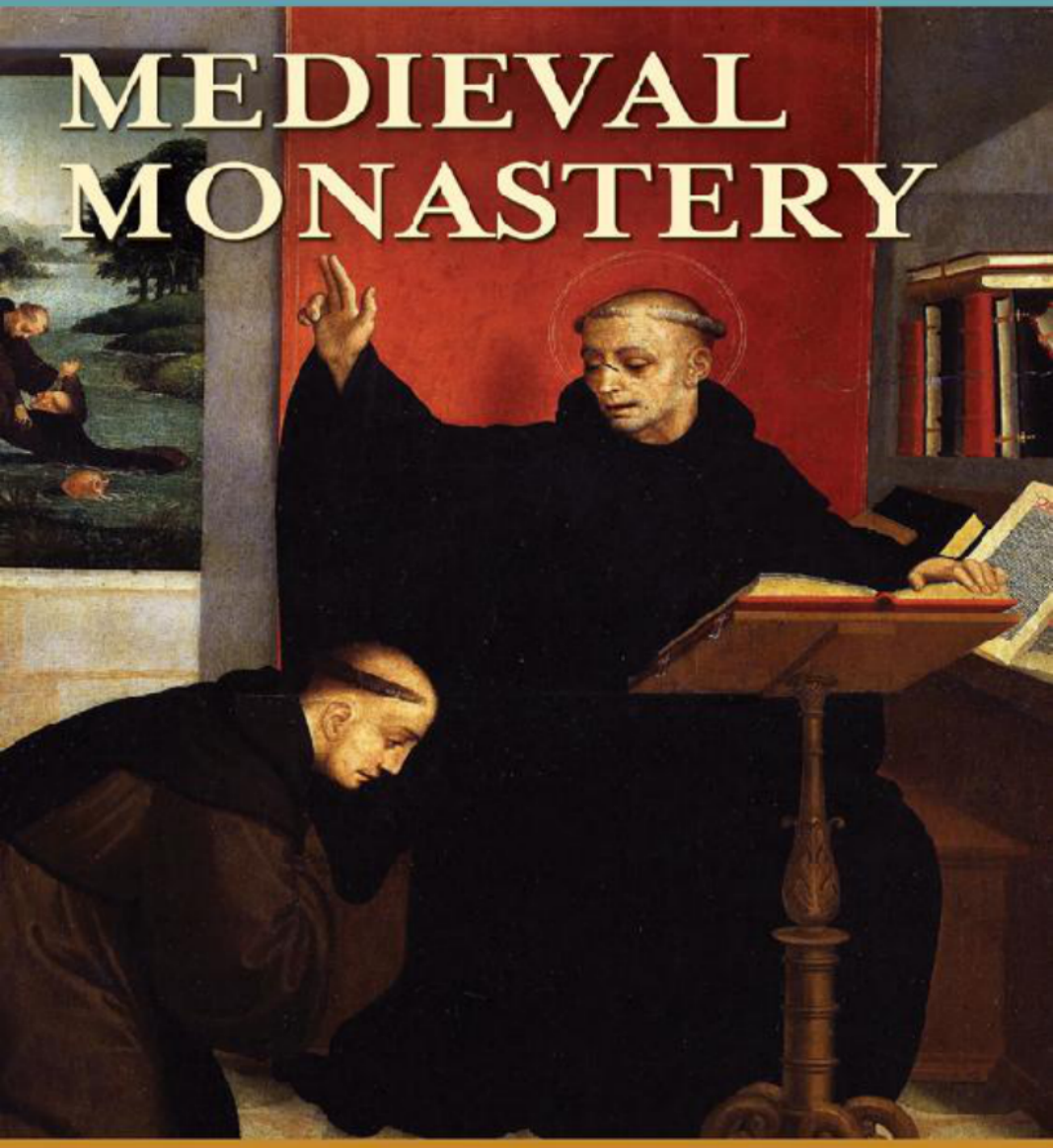

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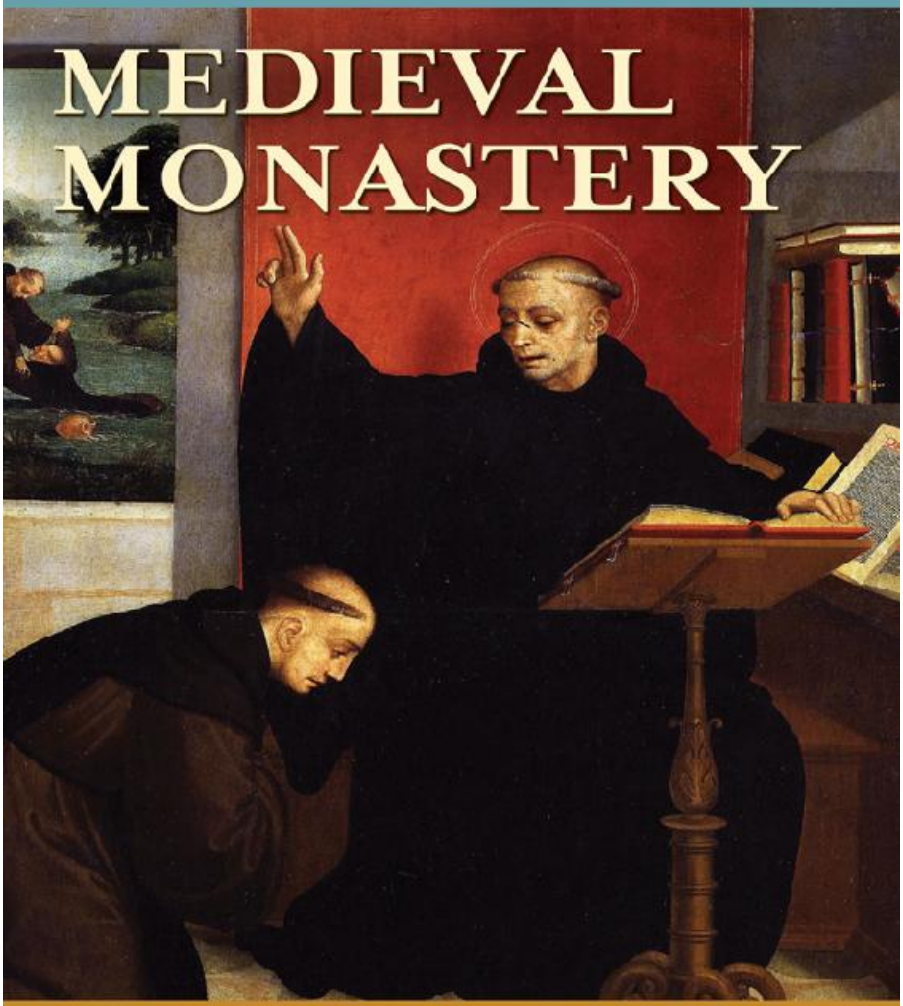

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MEDIEVAL MONASTERY

SHERRI OLSON

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A traveler in 1300 would have been hard put to it to find a place in [England, France, Germany, and Italy] more than twenty miles from the nearest religious house; and in the richest areas, in the Low Countries, the Rhineland, in Burgundy, Normandy, Poitou, Provence, Lombardy and Tuscany, more than fifteen—and to this day in many parts of western Europe one can walk from one surviving fragment of a medieval abbey to the next for weeks on end.

—Christopher Brooke
The Age of the Cloister (2003), p. 273

Blanche: I have no other refuge.
Prioress: Our Rule is not a refuge. It is we who guard the Rule, not the Rule, us.

—From *The Carmelites*, a play about a Carmelite convent in Compiègne during the French Revolution and Terror, by Georges Bernanos (transl. Gerard Hopkins), p. 41

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Thanks to Michael Howser, librarian and cartographer at the University of Connecticut Libraries' Map and Geographic Information Center (MAGIC), for producing the maps for this volume.

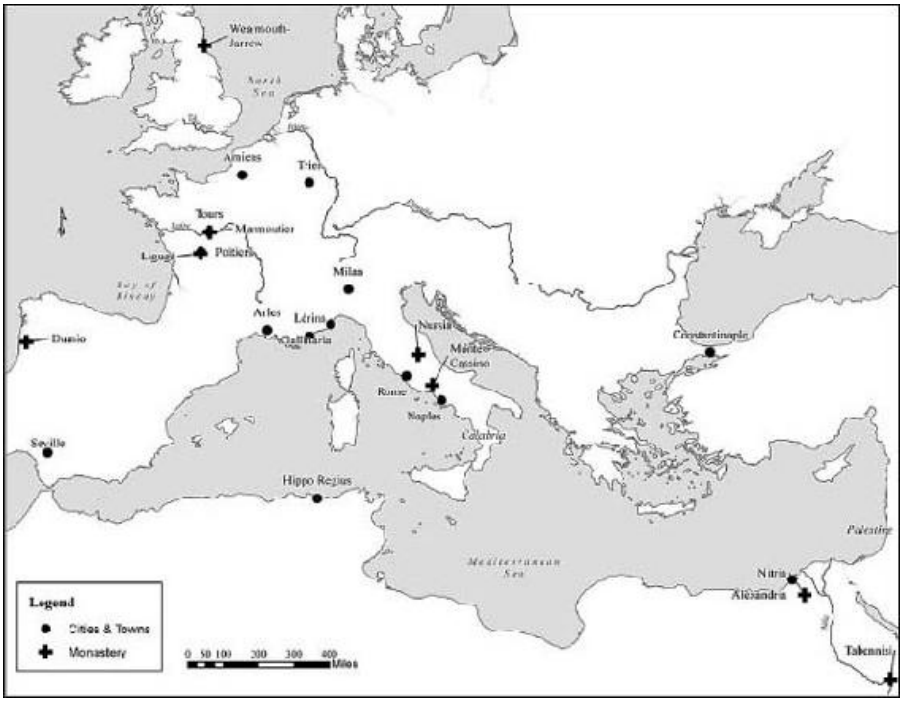
I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the excellent studies of monasticism that I have drawn upon, both general and specialized, especially those by C. H. Lawrence, Christopher Brooke, and Joan Evans. Most of the primary sources used are available in English translation—and it is hoped that readers might be moved to read those more fully themselves.

My aim in the present book has been to select out of the vast richness of materials for daily life in a medieval monastery what was most representative, most informative, and best suited to give some hint of that vanished world. I have tried to write a book that fosters understanding of that world, and that brings to light the inherent interest in studying how groups of people centuries ago tried to live according to an ideal. Monasteries never claimed to be utopian communities, but they were societies organized according to a high and demanding purpose. What is noteworthy is not how often or how much they failed to realize those standards—the details of their straying—but rather the tremendous adaptability and staying power of those ideas and practices, so that the monasteries that were succumbing to the axe in the early modern period, as indeed monasteries in the modern world, have a core in common with the first communities of ascetics building huts for themselves in the deserts of Egypt more than 1,700 years ago. I hope to have shown something of that great historical enterprise in these pages.

INTRODUCTION

For most people, a modern monastery may seem to be a curious holdover from a remote and no longer relevant past. The attractions of living out one's life "behind closed doors" are not self-evident to everyone, especially if you agree with the historian who, in a discussion of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (one of the most important monastic rules in Christian history), claimed that the twelve "degrees of humility" propounded by the *Rule* "add up to the image of a society that is absolutist and totalitarian.… No modern dictator could hope to control the minds and behavior of his subjects in quite the way that Benedict's abbot should be able to."[1]

This is a striking claim to make about the founder of an institution of almost any sort in the early Middle Ages. Life was precarious on the Italian peninsula in the sixth century, the time and place in which the *Rule of Saint Benedict* was composed. The relative peace following the invasion and settlement of the Ostrogothic peoples by the early part of the century was overthrown by another wave of warfare beginning in 535. As part of his initiative to "reunite" both halves of the old Roman Empire, the Christian Byzantine Emperor Justinian fought a twenty-year war of such destructiveness that it is said the people of Italy looked back to the rule of the Ostrogoths as a golden age. In the middle of the century, the entire Mediterranean world was devastated by a plague whose virulence equaled that of the Black Death which struck Europe in 1347. Then in 568, the Lombards, the last of the "Germanic" invaders, swept into Italy and established footholds in the north and south, an offensive that included the leveling in 577 of the monastery at Monte Cassino, Saint Benedict's own foundation and the one for which he wrote his famous *Rule*. Taking the saint's relics and their copy of the *Rule* with them, the monks fled for safety to Rome, seventy-five miles away. There they stayed in a monastery that had been founded by the man who would become Benedict's first biographer, an advocate of his *Rule*, and then pope in 590: Gregory I the Great.



Late Antique, Early Medieval Mediterranean and Europe; the travels of St Martin. (University of Connecticut Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center [MAGIC])

Monte Cassino itself remained deserted after 577 and was not rebuilt until 720, nearly a century-and-a-half after the Lombard attack. In 883 it was pillaged by Muslims, in 1046 by Normans, and in 1349 it was devastated by an earthquake. In the twentieth century it was the site of the largest land battle in Europe, one of the "bitterest and bloodiest of the Western Allies' struggles against the German Wehrmacht on any front of the Second World War." On February 15, 1944, allied forces dropped more than 500 tons of bombs on Monte Cassino. When the battle ended, casualties included some 350,000 people and about 40,000 manuscripts of the ancient and medieval worlds.[2] One bomb fell—but failed to explode—near the very spot where Benedict had died fourteen centuries earlier. Visitors to the monastery today will find that it has, once again, been completely and painstakingly rebuilt.[3]

Years of warfare, disruption of agriculture, and epidemic disease left an impoverished population and a formidable challenge to reconstruction efforts for Monte Cassino and other communities. From the sixth to the eleventh centuries, in fact, most efforts to establish political, social, and economic order would have to be based on "low-tech" solutions, that is, powerful ideas and dedicated adherents determined to keep them alive. And yet the monasteries survived and

flourished for centuries over an immense area, from Syria to Iceland, with much of the original spirit of monasticism intact, and many of its earliest practices still recognizable—even to the present day. What was daily life like for the many thousands of men, women, and children who lived in monasteries all over Europe? What role did these communities play in the world outside? Is there any "totalitarian" institution anywhere in world history that has displayed such fantastic staying power?

Why *would* anyone—especially a young person—willingly renounce sex, agree to restrictions on sleep, food, and freedom of movement, and enter a coercive society where uniformity of dress, sameness of routine, silence, and submission to authority, good or bad, were required? Why would parents in the Middle Ages give their children to a monastery as did, some eight centuries ago, the parents of ten-year-old Orderic Vitalis: "Weeping, my father gave a weeping child to Rainald the monk, and sent me into exile for God's love—nor ever after saw me."[4] Some powerful attraction was at work when sixteen-year-old Christina of Markyate, on a visit to revere the relics at Saint Albans Abbey (England) with her parents in the year 1112, "looked around carefully at the place, observed the religious bearing of the monks who dwelt there … declared how fortunate the inmates were, and expressed a wish to share in their fellowship." As her parents were preparing to leave, she secretly "made a sign of the Cross with one of her fingernails on the door as a token that she had placed her affection there," a gesture of youthful ardor—and determination—preserved for us across nine centuries.[5]

Modern monastics field questions about their vocation all the time. According to one twentieth-century abbess, "we often hear such reactions to our choice of life as, 'You must get lonely there—do you get out much?' 'You dear thing, you have sacrificed so much,' 'You're so young and pretty!' 'How did you get here?' (i.e., 'do *you* drive?')"; and the responses vary, just as they did in the Middle Ages: "it is a full life; I am here for love for the world; I am here because of a longing for God which could not be satisfied in the world. Material goods, prestigious jobs, even exciting vacations did not satisfy us. We were searching for something deeper, something more permanent than life in the world"; and finally, "it is a mystery."[6]

The monastery and its tradition of seclusion from the world were old long before communities of Christians who together renounced the world appeared in medieval Europe. *Monasterium* is the Latinized version of a Greek word (*monos*, alone; *monachos*, one who dwells alone, whence the word "monk") that was coined by pre-Christian Stoic philosophers to denote a place set apart where the lover of wisdom could retreat from worldly distractions to study and meditate.

The most famous Stoic of the ancient world was the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (d. A.D. 180). Forced to spend most of his nineteen-year reign fighting along the Danube frontier against barbarian invaders, he still thought longingly of the pleasures of retirement from the world and immersion in study: "Forget your books," he sternly admonishes himself in his private journal, "no more hankering for them; they were no part of your equipment … [m]islead yourself no longer; you will never read these notebooks again now, nor the annals of bygone Romans and Greeks, nor that choice selection of writings you have put by for your old age."[7] As we will see, monastic history in early medieval Europe is full of such stories of "contemplatives condemned to action,"[8] individuals who at heart were recluses but were forced to relinquish a life of retirement to serve the larger Christian society.

A life of collective prayer, denial of the body, and study within a community of like-minded persons lies at the core of other institutions besides the Christian monastery: the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam have all had their "austere communities."[9] Some see in ascetic practices impulses that are fundamental to human nature: in "every human heart … we find a yearning for self-surrender rising at times to a passion; … some part of everyone knows the longing for unconditional self-commitment."[10] Monasticism may be seen as a collective form of the desire for self-surrender, allied to an old belief that the body is a prison of the spirit. To imitate the sufferings of Jesus during his earthly existence was the best and highest way of life. To put it simply, one gives up the world and enters a monastery to search for God; and to do this, one needs above all "a certain spiritual leisure, a certain freedom in the interests of prayer in all its forms, and, above all, authentic contemplative peace."[11] The willing adoption of a regime of self-denial could not ensure one's salvation at the end of time—but it might help.

This introduction includes a brief history of the beginnings of the monastic tradition in Egypt and its emergence in Western Europe in the early Middle Ages. (Eastern Orthodox monasticism differs from its Western counterpart and will not be treated here.) In the following chapters we will look at the monastery from the time of Saint Benedict to the communities of the High and Later Middle Ages, that is, from the sixth to the fifteenth centuries, a period when monasteries (perhaps as many as 40,000 across Europe by the end of the period) continued to be conspicuous in education and record-keeping, technology, and agriculture. Even a small country like England had roughly 700 monasteries by the year 1300 (a figure that we know with some precision since King Henry VIII dissolved all of England's monasteries over a five-year period in the early sixteenth century, and

kept records of it). Yet, if the population of the country were roughly 4,000,000 people before the Black Death, and the average monastery held about 100 monks or nuns (excluding dependents, lay officials, servants, and guests), the monastic population of England at its highest figure comprised about 0.0175 percent of the total population. Part of the challenge in understanding the medieval monastery is accounting for the ability of so few to influence so much: as we shall see, that question can best be addressed by thinking of the monastery as a community with many links to the "outside."

Because it played so many different roles in medieval society, the sources for monastic history are abundant and take many different forms. They include the kinds of administrative records often generated by major landholders in the Middle Ages, such as account records, court rolls, and lists of tenants and their holdings. There are also monastic rules and books of monastic customs that spell out the day-to-day routine and organization of the monastery. Other sources are more literary in character, such as chronicles (formal narrative histories), devotional guides for monastic populations and lay people, and biographies (and a few autobiographies) of hermits, monks, and nuns, who took the great vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Some of these literary texts became classics of Western literature, such as Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, a devotional text (and up to the end of the nineteenth century, one of the most widely read books in the West) written for quasi-monastic communities of lay men and women that appeared in northern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The numerous offshoots and imitators of the monastery that emerged in medieval society are further proof of its vitality and importance: in the High Middle Ages (c. 1000–1300), parish priests, cathedral clergy, young women employed in the cloth industry of northern Europe, those who cared for the sick in hospitals and leper houses, and other groups, both lay and clerical, were inspired by the monastic example to lead a quasi-monastic life. This was a living and, evidently to many, an appealing tradition.

Much has been written about the different monastic orders, the history of reform, and the careers of famous abbots and abbesses, such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), theologian, controversialist, preacher of the second Crusade, and abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux (France), and Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), theologian, herbalist, composer of music, and founder and abbess of a convent near Bingen on the Rhine. The emphasis of the present book is on the nuts and bolts of the medieval monastery: by a close reading of the evidence, we will try to understand what sort of person would enter a monastery, and for what reason: was the monastic vocation freely chosen, was it simply a career choice, was it only for the

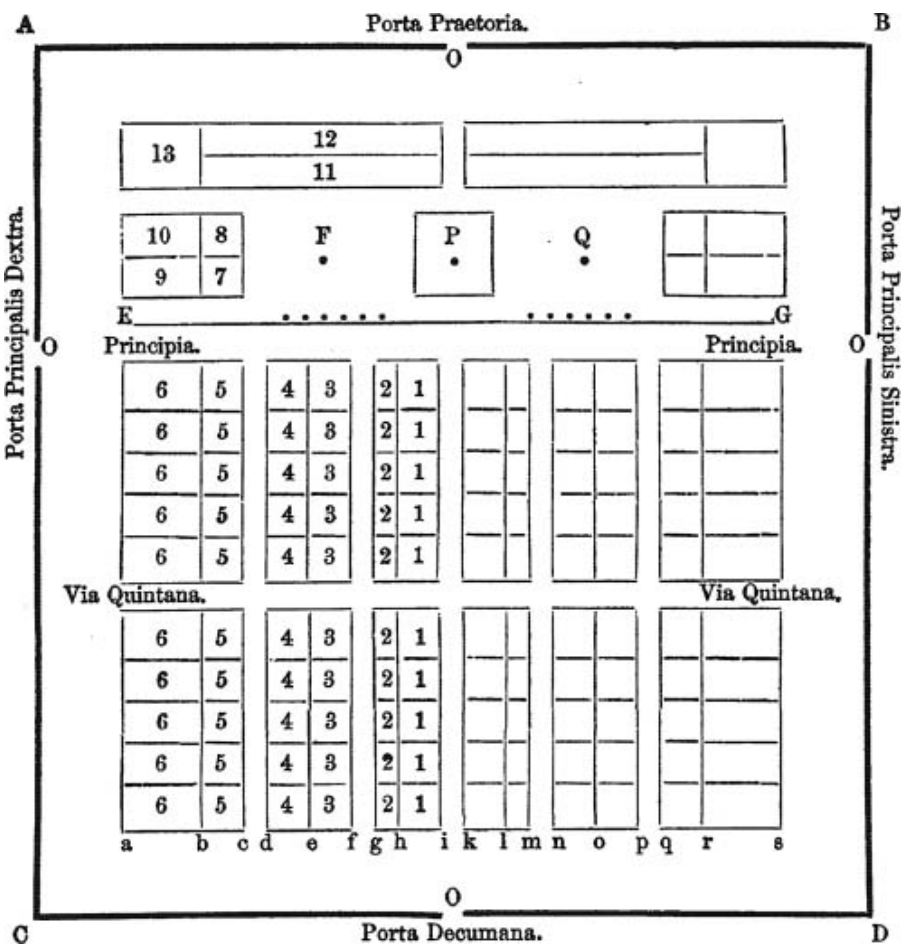
aristocracy and the well-to-do? How did the monks and nuns live? How did nunneries differ from male monastic houses ("monkeries")? Did medieval people believe that women were capable of the same heroic renunciation as men, and if so was it valued as highly? Did they really renounce sex, both heterosexual and homosexual, and stint themselves on food, drink, and sleep? Did monks and nuns ever change their minds and run away? (The answer is yes and sometimes together, but very rarely.) Who governed the monastery, how were disputes resolved, who produced and delivered their food, collected their honey and wax, brewed their ale? What did they do all day? What were their relations with, and impact upon, the outside world? Since the inhabitants of monasteries depended on the farming expertise and labor of peasants (who comprised more than 90% of the population), as customary or free tenants, hired servants, or *conversi* (lay brothers and sisters who worked for the monastery), what was the nature of monk/nun-peasant relations? Were they based on a "master and subordinate" relationship, were there elements of reciprocity or even equality—and why is this an important question? What kind of society did the monastery help to create?

From its start, almost twenty centuries ago, the monastery has provided an escape from, or an alternative to, "the world," a place for people who share a value system that turned away from the lifestyles and ordinary pastimes of most people, that is, marriage, family, sex, and popular entertainment. Yet it quickly became an important part of its Mediterranean and later, European, homeland. In the late imperial period, the monastery was a refuge for those dismayed by the flood of tepid converts who became Christian after the Emperor Constantine's conversion in 312. In the ground-zero conditions that existed after the barbarian invasions of the fourth through sixth centuries, and again in the era of the Viking, Magyar, and Muslim invasions of the ninth and tenth centuries, the monastery was a powerful agent in the survival of medieval civilization. By enduring and rebuilding under terrible conditions it acquired the characteristics of survivability and adaptability. How an institution dedicated to renunciation of the world and the *individual's* quest for salvation could play such a crucial role in a world often under siege is the major question addressed by the present chapter.

ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN MONASTERY

Egypt and Syria were the cradles of Christian monasticism. Monasteries emerged there in the third and fourth centuries, as the result of the experience, teaching, and tradition of many people, most of them unknown to us. Historians believe that Christian ascetics first sought refuge in the desert to escape state-wide persecutions carried

out in the years 250–251 under the Emperor Decius, and that many of these people, having found desert life congenial to their aspirations, simply stayed there. Most of these men and women are nameless to us; hence for knowledge of the early desert experience we must rely on a few individuals who attracted the admiration of talented biographers. Pride of place belongs to the Egyptians, Saints Anthony and Pachomius. Anthony (c. 251–356) was born to a prosperous farming family in Alexandria in the mid-third century, and was raised a Christian. As a young man he had a life-altering experience (of a sort that was common among ancient and medieval Christians) when he walked into church one day just in time to hear read aloud the famous passage from the Gospel of Matthew: "If you will be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor and come follow me, and you shall have riches in heaven" (Matt: 19:21). Anthony took this message to heart, sold off the family estate he had inherited, gave the proceeds to the needy, made provisions for his younger sister, and moved out to the desert, a place that contemporary Egyptians, both Christians and pagans, believed to be populated with demons and evil spirits, just as their ancestors had in the time of the Pharaohs. Here was an ideal place for wrestling in solitude with one's sins; and though besieged by temptation (chiefly visions of voluptuous women, according to tradition), and eating and drinking barely enough to keep a tiny bird alive, life in the desert must have agreed with Anthony, for he lived to the age of 105.



Plan of a Roman army camp (after a description by the historian Polybius, second century B.C.), another example of an orderly community of the premodern world. Some of the features shown include (P) the general's tent, (tents #7-10) the general's staff, and (F) the public market. The rows of tents numbered 1-6 housed, respectively, the cavalry, the infantry of the third, second, and first lines of battle, the allied cavalry, and the allied infantry. (Ramsay, William. *A Manual of Roman Antiquities*, 1851)

Anthony favored the solitary or hermit life (Greek *eremia*, desert) but several of his disciples established communities, for example, at Nitria, west of the Nile delta, where solitary and communal elements were mixed together: there, each hermit stayed in his own cave or hut, emerging only for common prayer and the weekly Mass on Saturdays and Sundays. There was a common church and bakery—and even a common whip for flagellation. The brothers had a meal together on Saturday evening, prayed together, and attended a meeting headed by a "council of elders" who oversaw the community. On Sunday all attended Mass (and anyone in need of correction would get his beating with the whip). Such a community, where there was

no real centralized supervision and each man was left to his own devices for much of the day, was called a *laura* (from the Greek word for "path," referring to the common pathway that connected the huts of the men).

In contrast, Anthony's contemporary, Pachomius (286–346), was a pagan who had been forced into service in the Roman army, converted to Christianity as a young adult, and experimented with solitary desert living. His own experience convinced him that the soul seeking salvation was beset with so many difficulties that life as a hermit (i.e., eremitic monasticism) was suitable only for the few. Most people would fare better, he thought, living in a community (i.e., cenobitic monasticism, from the Greek *coen*, common + *bios*, life). Cenobitic monasticism was clearly an idea whose "time had come," for peasants and townspeople flocked by the hundreds to the monasteries Pachomius founded in the Nile valley in the first half of the fourth century. His sister, Mary, established a community of women at Tabennisi, near Pachomius's first house on the Nile, where they lived according to the same rule as men. In the same way that a Roman army camp followed a regular pattern with standard features (rows of tents for the soldiers, for the officers, stables, streets, camp headquarters, etc.), so these self-sufficient monastic communities were in effect their own villages, each with a church, common dining hall (refectory), guesthouse and infirmary, and rows of small houses for the monks to sleep in, usually about twenty in a house.[12] The day was divided up by collective worship, private reflection, a common meal, and manual labor, usually of the kind that would render the community self-supporting, such as making linen from flax, weaving baskets and mats from rushes, and working in the gardens and fields. In such settlements, women and men, rich and poor, urban and rural, all could experience the "call of the desert."

Women were from the start an important part of these developments; indeed, it is traditional to see the women who "provided" for Jesus and his disciples "out of their means" [Luke 8:3] as the first "nuns." Similarly, widows and virgins in the early years of the new religion were active alongside men in performing "social work," giving alms, praying, and caring for the destitute (so much so that the pagan Emperor Julian [r. 361–363] complained about the "godless Galileans" who took care of their own and everybody else's poor). We recall that when Anthony headed out to the desert he established his younger sister in a community of trustworthy virgins (hence, some kind of monastery), and that Pachomius's sister Mary headed a monastic community. In the fourth century Saint Macrina founded a monastery for women (in modern-day Turkey) and encouraged her brothers Gregory and Basil (who also became saints, like herself) to

lead monastic lives. Thus, in the fourth and fifth centuries, as the desert filled with hermits, the famous "Fathers of the Desert" were joined by "Mothers of the Desert." In fact, there were collections of the "sayings of the desert mothers" just as there were "sayings of the fathers," in this period.[13]

Saint Sarah of Egypt, a contemporary of Anthony, who was about eighty years of age when she died c. 370, was a desert mother to whom all sorts of people came for advice. She was once asked by two elders: "What is the narrow and sorrowful path?" and she answered: "The narrow and sorrowful path is this: to sit in stillness, fast, be silent, stay up in vigils [i.e., all night], read, make a multitude of prostrations if there is strength, not go out from the cell at all except to church, and to cut off one's own will for the sake of God." So valued was her advice that she was warned (by these same two elders) not to become proud because "hermits come to me, a woman." She lived beside a river (probably the Nile) and is reputed never once to have raised her eyes to look at it in sixty years. Thus, in reality and in tradition, women were as capable of feats of heroic self-denial, and acquired the same desert wisdom, as men.

We recall that Pachomius turned to his career of building monasteries after years of military service, and that the physical layout of his monasteries owed much to the regular plan of an army camp. The daily routine of monastic life also bears the imprint of army camp life, for when they had finished building their camp, Roman soldiers lived together

> by companies with quietness and decency [and] all their other affairs [are] managed with good order and security. Each company hath also their wood, and their [grain] and their water brought to them [and] they neither sup or dine as they please themselves singly, but all together. Their times also for sleeping, and watching, and rising, are notified before hand by the sound of trumpets, nor is anything done without a signal … when they are to go out of their camp, the trumpet gives a sound, at which nobody lies still … then do the trumpets sound the third time, that they are to go out in order to excite those that on any account are a little tardy …[14]

There is much here that resembles the monastic way of life: maintaining silence and order, taking meals together, and sleeping and rising at fixed times mirror the daily regimen of a typical monastery of the medieval West. Group activities regulated by a common signal are central to the monastic regime; and there is a similar attention paid to those who "on any account are a little tardy" answering the signal that calls everyone to some duty: when the

monks arise at 2:00 or 3:00 A.M. for nightly prayer, they are to encourage any of their fellows who have difficulty waking up and who might be late to prayers. (One can imagine how hard it would have been, especially in a northern monastery, to climb out of a warm bed in the middle of the night in an unheated dormitory.) Indeed even the demands and hardships of the soldier's life seem to prefigure the life of a Christian monk or nun: unquestioning obedience to one's superior, poverty (the hard lot of the soldier), and even celibacy (a rule that was being undermined by "long stints of garrison duty" but that certainly survived as a traditional ideal).[15] The reshaping of classical into Christian civilization in the late ancient world is clearly reflected in the monastery.

"A DESERT FULL OF MOURNERS"

A new era in the development of monasticism was opened by a (formerly) pagan emperor. As mentioned above, in 312 the Emperor Constantine converted to Catholic Christianity (as opposed to any one of the various heretical sects of Christians then flourishing in the Empire). While there is little reason to doubt that the emperor had a sincere personal conversion, he must also have been motivated by the hope that a Christian Roman Empire would win the allegiance of Christian subjects, whose numbers had been increasing significantly from the middle of the third century. His alliance of Church and State was so successful that his biographer, the bishop Eusebius, triumphantly described the two as yoked in "double harness." Constantine's favoring of Christians resulted in large numbers of conversions, which the Church in some respects was not ready for, as it was impossible to educate such great numbers in so short a time. Even worse, many of these new converts appeared to the zealous to be no better than "time-servers and half-converted pagans,"[16] especially in comparison with those who had been hunted down during the recent State persecutions of Christians between 303 and 311, and had chosen martyrdom over renouncing their religion. Another new and unwelcome development was that doctrinal conflicts which had once concerned only the faithful now, after 312, concerned the State too, a "Big Brother" that would use its power to promote uniformity, build churches, disseminate copies of the Bible, give job-seeking Christians preferential treatment, grant the clergy tax breaks, and make ecclesiastical office a prize to fight over. The advent of "imperial Christianity" also entailed the permanent removal of the capital of the empire from Rome, with all its pagan associations, to a new Christian capital, a "New Rome," on the Bosphorus: Constantinople (dedicated 330). Now Christianity was truly enshrined in the halls of power.

One form of protest against this deplorable situation was to escape

from it, to leave behind the world, the city, and the emerging mainstream Church. Saint Basil (329–379), the brother of Saint Macrina and one of the founders of eastern monasticism, writing about the Christian community of his time, declared sadly that "the shepherds are driven out; in their place grievous wolves are brought in which harry the flock. Houses of prayer have none to assemble in them; the deserts are full of mourners."[17] In the eyes of people like Basil, the State "takeover" of Christianity gave a new meaning, even a new urgency, to the practice of self-abnegation in the desert. In short, monasticism in this early period was given great vitality by an opposition to the mainstream, institutional Church.

The cradles of monasticism were in the East, in Egypt and Syria; in the West, fourth-century Italy and Gaul (France) were home to the earliest monasteries, and the point from which they spread throughout Europe. The great historical development that created tens of thousands of monasteries by the end of the Middle Ages began with no deliberate colonization plan; rather, monasticism "spread gradually and sporadically as a plant spreads from seeds that are blown abroad,"[18] brought to the West in varying trajectories by Christian exiles. Hilary, the first bishop of Poitiers (r. 353–368), who was exiled for a time to Asia Minor (modern Turkey), must have learned about the monastic movement there and brought the precious information back with him to Gaul, where he was to have a powerful effect on Saint Martin of Tours (discussed later). Athanasius, the archbishop of Alexandria and biographer of Saint Anthony, was exiled from the East during Arian Christian persecutions of Catholics, and stayed at the Western imperial capital at Trier (Germany) in the 330s and in Rome itself in the 340s.

THE "FRUITFUL WASTES OF THE DESERT"

These "pioneers" of monasticism found fertile ground in the West in the fourth century, where there were already men and women living the ascetic life, perhaps chiefly as solitaries. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, founded monasteries outside that city and his sister Marcellina lived in one of them. Ambrose's famous convert, Augustine, recounts in his autobiographical *Confessions* (written 397–398) how he had learned from an acquaintance about Saint Anthony (who had died only thirty years earlier), and how amazed he had been to "hear of the wonders … worked so recently, almost in our own times." This same acquaintance also told him the story of two officials of the Roman state who had abandoned the secular world for the monastic life upon reading the *Life* of Anthony. Instead of speaking of "mourners in the desert," Augustine speaks of the "groups of monks in the monasteries, of their way of life that savors of [God's] sweetness, and of the fruitful

wastes of the desert."[19]

Augustine spent several years in various monastic and quasi-monastic communities, in Italy and his native North Africa, before he too was forced to embrace worldly duties instead of the contemplative life he hankered for. We have his own and his biographer's account of the "ambush" that made Augustine the new assistant bishop of the diocese of Hippo Regius (modern Bône, Algeria): already a well-known Christian writer, he was attending church in the town of Hippo where he was looking for a place to establish a monastery. During the service, when the bishop who was officiating that day announced to the congregation that he was on the lookout for an assistant priest, the people standing around Augustine shouted out his name and pushed him forward. Augustine cried and resisted but "I was caught" (years later, he referred to this incident, saying that "a slave may not contradict his lord"). Augustine's biographer, Possidius, tells us that Augustine "wept copiously," but "in the end, they had what they wanted."[20]

However, Augustine was determined to preserve for himself a semblance of the contemplative life. As assistant bishop, he lived in a monastery that he established in a garden attached to the church at Hippo. The monks in this community included poor men, some of them in fact former slaves. Five years later, in 396 when he became the head bishop of Hippo, he moved to the bishop's official residence in order not to disturb the "servants of God" as he called the members of the "garden monastery," and he created another community for himself and his new clerical household, living the "common life" as much as he could. His influence on the development of monasticism continued throughout his life: in 423 he wrote to a community of nuns seeking his guidance on the common life, and this short letter served as the foundation for the Augustinian Rule.[21] Augustine's view of the monastic life influenced practice elsewhere, in Spain and Italy, most notably Benedict's *Rule* (see Chapter One), where some attribute Benedict's humane approach and concern for the brothers to the influence of Augustine. In short, though Augustine lived the last forty years of his life as a bishop, he made his mark on monastic practice as well.

Another reader of Athanasius's biography of Anthony, Jerome, secretary to the pope, formed a quasi-monastic group of wealthy women in Rome. He traveled to Egypt where he experimented with the eremitic life for about six years, during which time he learned Hebrew (apparently to help pass the time) from a Jew who had converted to Christianity, and later founded monasteries in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It was at the latter monastery that he organized a small army of scholars and scribes to help translate the Bible into

Latin, producing, around the year 400, the *Vulgate*, which was to become the most common version of the Bible in the West by the end of the first millennium.

SAINT MARTIN

In northwestern Gaul, monasteries were founded in the valley of the Loire River by Martin (316–397), protégé of Saint Hilary and later bishop of Tours, at Ligugé and Marmoutier in 363 and 372, respectively. Martin was born in what is now Hungary and, like his contemporary, Pachomius, was drafted against his will into the Roman army as a very young man, at the age of fifteen. He converted to Christianity in early adulthood, and spent twenty-five years in the military, possibly as an army medic for part of that time. It was during his military service, on a bitter winter day, that Martin met a poor naked man at the gate of the town of Amiens begging for something to cover himself with, and taking his sword he cut his military cloak in half, and gave one part to the poor man. That night Martin had a vision of Christ wearing the part of his cloak that he had given away, and he heard Christ speaking to a "multitude of angels," saying "Martin, who is still but a catechumen [i.e., still receiving instruction in the Christian faith and not yet baptized] clothed me with this robe." Like Pachomius, Martin's long military service was put to good use when he began setting up monastic communities. As one historian has perceptively remarked, it is "strange to think that western monasticism, with all its cultural triumphs, had its humble origin in the troubled cogitations of young Roman Christian soldiers."[22]

After his discharge in 356 at the age of forty, Martin began to explore the monastic life (although the very first thing he did upon discharge was to visit his aged parents and try to convert them to Christianity, an endeavor that worked with his mother but not his father). His career over the next several years is typical of the wanderings, chance occurrences, and fleeting comradeships that were such common features of the early years of monastic history in the West. He founded a small hermitage in Milan, but was driven out by the Arian Christians in that city. It was during this time that he too read the book that was taking the West by storm, Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* which was published in Milan in 357. This book acted upon Martin as forcefully as it would upon Augustine some thirty years later. Martin left Milan with a priest as his companion, and began the walk back to Poitiers, taking the long way home, along the coast (see the map illustrating the travels of Saint Martin). He came to a deserted island, called Gallinaria (modern Isola Gallinara, off the coast of northern Italy between Genoa and Nice), and lived for a time there as a hermit. Conditions for punishing the body there must have been excellent, for

Martin almost died on Gallinaria, where it was certainly colder and wetter than in Egypt, and where he lived on roots (including poisonous ones). When he left the island around the year 360 he seemed to have formed the notion, as many "reformed" hermits did, that the communal life was preferable to the eremitic one.

Back in northern Gaul, Martin was given a run-down villa in the countryside near Poitiers where he could live as a hermit, with the plan of accepting anyone who might wish to join him to form a monastery. This was an area with a series of natural caves hollowed out of the sandstone cliffs, called Locociacum (Ligugé), the "place of the little cells," where a number of men gathered in a community, intent on following the Egyptian eremitical tradition, as they understood it, as closely as they could. Here Martin remained for ten years, and became renowned as an exorcist and healer (thanks to the expertise he had gained during his years as an army medic) when he restored a young member of the community to life. His life at Ligugé ended abruptly and violently: just as he had been seized and forced into military service so many years before, so in 371 he was forcibly taken (indeed his biographer claims that he was tricked into coming out of his hiding place by being asked to perform a miracle), this time to be made the bishop of the diocese of Tours, an office he held until his death in 397. From the start Martin found a way to be both monk and bishop (just as Augustine would do in North Africa some twenty years later), choosing not to live in the bishop's residence in the city, and building a hut for himself along the Loire River, three miles outside the city of Tours. In time, other men gathered to live near him, and the monastery of Marmoutier was born, with another house established for women in the city (in the interests of protection).

Both his earlier military service and his monastic life at Ligugé left a strong imprint on Martin's career as bishop. As a healer and exorcist, he was able to cure a child of snakebite and bring back to life a slave who had committed suicide by hanging himself; and he showed a special concern for the mentally ill and handicapped, visiting them, inviting them into church, and including special prayers for them in the Sunday Mass. Martin not only lived like a monk as much as his episcopal duties would allow him, he kept his hand in the larger world of monastic affairs, as in his defense of the Priscillianists, a quasi-monastic ascetic group in Spain who, like the zealots of the age of Constantine a half century earlier, were severely critical of mainstream Christianity. Martin is said to have arrived to defend them at a trial held in Trier in 386 "like an outraged prophet from the desert."[23] Martin and Augustine, among the great architects of Western monasticism and indeed of the whole Church in the late Roman period, are perhaps best understood as monks forced into

episcopal office, as would also be true (as we shall see) of Gregory the Great, pope from 590 to 604.

Meanwhile, monasteries continued to be established elsewhere, in Gaul, Italy, Spain, and Ireland. In the early fifth century two monasteries, one for men and one for women, were founded at Marseilles by John Cassian, a native of the Balkans. He had spent fifteen years living among the hermits of Palestine and Egypt, and twenty years later wrote two highly influential treatises, the *Conferences* (or *Collations*) and the *Institutes*, which encapsulated the eremitic wisdom he had learned at the feet of Eastern masters. These are the works that are named, along with the Old and New Testaments, as books that should be read to "cultivate virtue" in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. (It was Cassian who gave the words "chapter" and "collation" to the Western monastic vocabulary: the setting where a chapter of Cassian was read before a meeting of the community became the "chapter house," and the meal that was eaten during another public reading of Cassian became a "collation.") Lérins, an early fifth-century foundation located on the French Riviera, near Cannes, became the monastic headquarters of southern Gaul in this period. It produced a number of men of the monk-turned-bishop type, who constantly crossed the frontier between the monastery and the world outside. One of the most influential of these in the early sixth century was Caesarius, another monk drafted into episcopal service, who became the bishop of Arles for forty years (502–542), and who also wrote a famous rule for women's monastic houses, the first rule in the West written especially for women religious.

The evangelizer of Ireland, Saint Patrick, led a life of wandering just as Martin had done (although perhaps with more adventure and danger). As a child in Wales he had been captured by Irish pirates and sold into slavery, later escaping and making his way to the continent. It was at Lérins that he trained as a monk, and from there planned his mission to take Christianity to the land of his former captivity, arriving back in Ireland around the year 430. The Christian Church that he nurtured there centered more on the monastery and the abbot than on the diocese and the bishop, as was the typical structure elsewhere. Around 380 a pilgrim nun from western Spain, Egeria, traveled in the eastern Mediterranean and wrote a book about her travels to the Holy Land—her account is eyewitness proof that there were already many small monasteries in Egypt and the valley of the Jordan River by the end of the fourth century. (She is a forerunner of Saint Teresa of Avila who, in the sixteenth century, was also an exceptionally well-travelled nun, almost a vagabond. Saint Teresa journeyed throughout Spain establishing convents, but in her day notions of female decorum dictated that she and the nuns who

accompanied her travel in covered wagons. The women never looked out at the landscape, and heard nothing but the bells on the mules' collars: no sky, no breeze, no view! They followed the regular course of reading and prayers, so these were literally "travelling convents"; in effect, Saint Teresa and her nuns took their enclosure with them—Egeria was obviously able to travel with the shades up, so to speak).[24] Saint Martin of Braga (Portugal, d. 579) also filled a multitude of roles, as missionary, author (principally as translator of the sayings of the Desert Fathers), founder of monasteries and, for a time, as a combined bishop—abbot of the diocese and monastery of Dumio. Around the year 600, Isidore, the bishop of Seville, wrote a monastic rule clearly influenced by what would become the most influential monastic rule in the West, the *Rule* of Saint Benedict (see Chapter One).

This fledgling monastic "movement" was dependent on texts, traditions, and individuals for its survival and spread. An illustration of the precariousness of that movement is seen in the life work of Cassiodorus, another son of distinguished family background who served in the brave new world of Ostrogothic rule in sixth-century Italy. When that state collapsed he went to Constantinople where he stayed for many years before returning to Italy c. 550, not to Rome but to his family estates in Calabria (the toe of Italy). At one time Cassiodorus had dreamed of establishing a Christian academy in Rome to mirror the pagan academies of the ancient world, a dream that he still cherished. This was now impossible—and since he could not establish an Academy, he founded a monastery (actually two, one for monks and one for hermits), on his own land, a community that he called *Vivarium*, which means "fishpond." Here he started a library with books he brought back from the East, and introduced the practice of monastic book copying—an activity which was to take its place alongside work in the cloister, kitchen, or field as a monastic labor. Cassiodorus organized the *scriptorium* or writing office of his new monastery, since copying manuscripts was to be the chief labor of the monks there, and laid out systematic rules for manuscript production and book-making. Scribes were to be as accurate as possible, and keep track of how much time they spent copying by using a sundial on sunny days and on cloudy days, a water clock (which measured time by the regulated flow of water from one vessel to another). Following his lead, monasteries would reign supreme in book production for the next 700 years.

Cassiodorus's wish was to preserve Christian culture, which was clearly under threat. To that end he established a reading program, a bibliography of books to be read, both pagan and Christian (including, for example, Aristotle's treatises on logic and various commentaries on

the Bible), in the belief that both were needed to foster Bible study, and that pagan classics could serve a Christian purpose. Cassiodorus lived to be about 100 years old, dying in 585—a man born within ten years of the deposition of the last emperor in the West in 476, who lived through the Ostrogothic, Byzantine, and Lombard Wars. His monasteries did not long survive him—but his reading program, the tradition of copying books, and many of his manuscripts did. They would be taken up eagerly in the centuries that followed.

This was the heroic age of European monasticism, an age of mobility, not only of armies and refugees but also of men and women in search of their vision of the Christian life. We might say that the uncertainty and danger of daily life in Martin's Gaul or Cassiodorus's Italy mirror the dangers that Christians had faced as a suspect minority in the Roman State before Constantine's conversion. Within the monastic community, as long as it escaped destruction (and often it did not), the relative security and predictable routine contrasted forcibly with the disorder outside. All in all, the new monastic life was based upon foundations that seem impossibly fragile to modern eyes: a monastic *Rule*, stories of monasteries in the East, biographies of saints, the living example perhaps provided by a holy man or woman living nearby.

In Chapter One we consider the monastic life as it took shape in the single most important monastery in early medieval Europe, Monte Cassino, the birthplace of the Benedictine Rule. Later chapters will explore other monastic communities, relying on evidence provided by different types of "witnesses": the Plan of Saint Gall, the "Customs" of Cluny, biographies of saints, literary and other works (including a rare autobiography) written by monastic men and women, the visitation records of Archbishop Eudes Rigaud in thirteenth-century Normandy, and the *Register* of the nuns at Godstow, Oxford. As much as possible, we will let the monks, nuns, and those who observed them most closely do the talking; for, as one historian has pointed out, simply knowing the daily schedule of a monastery does not tell us of the "life as lived by the individual." For that we need "personal accounts of the human incidents and spiritual experiences within a monastery,"[25] and the medieval period is rich in such materials.

WHY STUDY MONASTERIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

In 1944 the medieval historian Marc Bloch, a middle-aged academic and member of the French Resistance, was captured and tortured by the Nazis, and executed by a firing squad in a field outside the city of Lyon. He left behind an unfinished manuscript, *The Historian's Craft*. In this remarkable book, Bloch argues that a spirit of toleration is essential in the study of history. He claims that the historian's

principal task is to "plumb the consciousness" of the people of the past, in order to explain and understand them. For Bloch, understanding is the "beacon light" of the historian's studies, and to make this point he compared the task of understanding to the much easier act of passing judgment: to understand someone else "we must virtually lay aside our own ego," whereas to pass judgment on them, that is, "to say what we think, we need only remain ourselves. This is a less arduous endeavor. How much easier it is to write for or against Luther than to fathom his soul."[26]

It is in this spirit that we will approach the monks and nuns of centuries ago. Not the least of our difficulties will be to lay aside modern ideas about an unavoidable opposition, even antagonism between community and the individual, and to imagine instead life in a community where the individual is "dedicated to and moved by the evidently powerful and stirring doctrine of obedience and humility."[27] It could in fact be argued that, as much as we prize individualism in the modern era, medieval people were more "individualistic" than we are: they lived in a world where states could not gather information and ensure compliance as modern states can, and they were not exposed to the homogenizing effects of modern "mass culture" and the pressure to conform which it creates. (The closest thing to mass culture that medieval people knew was sermons.)[28] Indeed, what has been observed in a modern monastery may have been equally true for its medieval ancestor:

> [T]he comparative rigidity and uniformity [of monastic life] have often been supposed to breed conformism, to diminish individual traits and eccentricities. This is not wholly untrue: communities can carry a single stamp, and the communal life has undoubtedly bred certain common characteristics. Yet the outsider who visits a lively community today is commonly struck by the opposite impression: that the common life has sharpened and strengthened the individuality of many of its adherents.[29]

If it is true, as one historian has written, that we live "[i]n an age when communities based on traditional and collegial bonds have largely disappeared,"[30] that would be another, and important reason, to try to understand the world of the medieval monastery. As we make our way through a variety of communities and regions, following a number of different guides, we will see whether it is possible to "plumb the consciousness" of those people who embraced asceticism and the common life eight, ten, or fifteen centuries ago, and whether we can understand how the monastic way of life shaped the personality, the identity of the individual. What did monks and nuns care about and why? How did they see the world? It is a good

challenge for the historian to take up such difficult questions, and a "daily life" approach is very friendly to such an attempt.

NOTES

1. Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe 300–1000* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 223.
2. Matthew Parker, *Monte Cassino: The Hardest Fought Battle of World War II* (New York: Anchor, 2005), pp. xiii–xiv.
3. There are a number of "virtual tours" of Monte Cassino available online, for example at http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=KNWw_ju_E2U&feature=endscreen; and http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=ZdkJ6FXChBI&NR=1; and for a short vocational film on the monastic life, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnKbPj7EhCg&NR=1&feature=endscreen.
4. Quoted in Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2003), p. 148.
5. This account of Christina was written by a contemporary who knew her personally. *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, ed. & trans. C. H. Talbot (reprint; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 39.
6. Quotations and paraphrases taken from a talk given by Mother Christophora, Abbess, Orthodox Monastery of the Transformation, Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, at Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in 1991. Photocopy in possession of the author; Section IV—"Reasons for Becoming a Nun."
7. Maxwell Staniforth, trans., *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 45 & 60.
8. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, 12th printing (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 28.
9. This is Gabriel Le Bras' term. See "The Sociology of the Church in the Early Middle Ages," in *Early Medieval Society*, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (New York: Appleton, 1967), pp. 47–57. Quotation at p. 48.
10. Quotations from Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1913), p. 3, and Wolfgang Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe: The Architecture of Orders* (Princeton: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 9.
11. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 18–19.
12. Peter King, *Western Monasticism: A History of the Monastic Movement in the Latin Church* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1999), pp. 23–4.
13. A book written by Abbot Isaiah (d. c. 490) includes sayings of some of the desert mothers. See *The Matericon: Instructions of Abba Isaiah to the Honorable Nun Theodora* (Safford, AZ: St Pasius Serbian Orthodox Monastery, 2001).
14. This account comes from a first-century text by the Jewish historian Josephus, quoted in Christopher Donaldson, *Martin of Tours: Parish Priest, Mystic and Exorcist* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 23–4.
15. Donaldson, *Martin of Tours*, p. 30.
16. Workman, *Evolution*, p. 6
17. Workman, *Evolution*, p. 9.
18. David Knowles, *Christian Monasticism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 25.
19. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 167–8.
20. The text and story are given in Thomas F. Martin and Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine of Hippo: Faithful Servant, Spiritual Leader* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2011), pp. 68–70.
21. This rule can be read at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/ruleaug.html.

22. See Donaldson, *Martin of Tours*, pp. 26–7, 30, for this discussion of Martin.
23. Donaldson, *Martin of Tours*, p. 117.
24. See Shirley Du Boulay, *St Teresa of Avila: An Extraordinary Life* (Katonah, NY: Bluebridge, 1995), p. 128.
25. Knowles, *Christian Monasticism*, p. 212.
26. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage, 1953), pp. 140–1, 143.
27. Julian Haseldine, "The Monastic Cult of Friendship," in *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism*, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 177–202; quotation at p. 201.
28. D. L. D'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 3–4.
29. Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister*, p. 45.
30. Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350–1250* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. lxxi.

1

BENEDICTINE BEGINNINGS

Monasteries were one of the great "success stories" of the late ancient world. They were flexible, adaptable, and hardy, and the times favored independent and self-sufficient institutions. One key to that success was that monasteries took a variety of forms and attracted all sorts of people who embraced monastic culture in all sorts of ways. In Egypt eremitic and cenobitic communities had fully emerged by the fourth century, and individuals passed back and forth between them, depending on circumstances. "Career" hermits like Anthony, who changed place often (usually to get away from admirers), also established monasteries. Pachomius, briefly a hermit, went on to establish "monastic villages," at least one of which attained a population approaching 3,000 people. Men who were only monks for a time, "monks at large,"[1] like Jerome played a vital role in the formation of monastic culture by preserving the teachings of the desert elders and founding monasteries themselves. Cassian was born in (modern-day) Bulgaria, spent fifteen years in Palestine, Egypt, Constantinople, and Syria, came to Rome, and then established a monastery in the south of France. Even as bishops, Augustine and Martin lived as much like monks as possible: as assistant bishop of Hippo Regius, the former established his "garden monastery" next to the church, and later organized his household along monastic lines; Martin, when he was not out on his rounds praying, healing, and exorcising, made his home in the little hut at Marmoutier. Cassiodorus built two monasteries on his own lands with his own funds, presided over each, fostered the copying of manuscripts, and outlined a complete Christian reading program, but never actually became a monk himself. By the year 600, in Gaul alone there were at least twenty different monastic rules in use.[2] "New" rules were continually being created since monastic leaders "anthologized," that is, they selected what they liked best from all the rules they knew of, and discarded what they did not like. Such independence marked monasticism at its core. The "mourners in the desert" were, in the words of one historian, driven by an "uncontaminated ideal of … individualism bent upon its own salvation and opposed to the excessive tyranny of the State."[3]

In this chapter we make a tour of the most famous early Western monastery, Monte Cassino, in the time of its founder, Saint Benedict (c. 480–547). Although Benedict's *Rule* in time became the blueprint for thousands of monasteries, and the three great vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience provided a common framework for monastic life, the early tradition of flexibility continued in the monastic world. Indeed, the Benedictine Order itself was not really an "Order" in the sense of a network of monasteries under central control: quite the opposite, it was a collection of independent, self-governing houses, each of which "found the Rule suitable to [its] needs" and very often kept that Rule "after its own fashion."[4] Such autonomy was partly the result of isolation and the difficulty of regular communication, especially in the early Middle Ages, but it was also fostered by specific provisions in the *Rule* itself: for example, the bishop, a powerful figure in the early medieval Church, was allowed no authority over the monastery, with the sole exception that if an unworthy abbot is elected, the bishop, abbots, or Christians in that vicinity are to intervene and appoint a good man to replace him (#64[5]).

Most monasteries in the early medieval West resembled the monastic villages of the Egyptian Thebaid: that is, working agricultural communities organized around a daily regime of prayer and labor. However, in contrast to Pachomius's monasteries, which housed thousands of monks and nuns in the nine communities he founded, European monasteries tended to be smaller. One monastery in France, at Corbie, may have had 350 monks before the year 1000,[6] but that would have been considered a large house for this period. For the sixth century the average figure would have been much smaller: the author of a monastic rule known as the *Rule of the Master* envisioned a community of about twenty-five monks, and according to tradition, Saint Benedict established about a dozen monasteries before he founded Monte Cassino, each containing twelve monks. Conditions certainly favored the small community because it could more easily avoid exceeding its ability to sustain itself than a larger house, and the simpler its character the easier it would be to rebuild after a Muslim, Magyar, or Viking raid, or even a Christian one, since such attacks were also launched by Christian lords—and ladies. (While the usual motive for an attack was to seize monastic goods and lands, there were other causes as well: in the late sixth century the nunnery of Holy Cross in Poitiers was almost destroyed by one of its nuns, Chrodechild, the daughter of a Frankish king, who objected to washing dishes and other labors, and led an assault on the monastery to kidnap the abbess with "forty rebel nuns and assorted thugs." Even in defeat she declared "I am queen.")[7]

MONTE CASSINO AND THE "SOLACE OF MANY"

Cassian's books, inspired by the desert tradition, and the *Rule of the Master* were borrowed from in the forging of the single most influential text in the history of Western monasticism, indeed second only to the Bible in importance, the *Rule of St Benedict*.[8] It was composed around 530 by Benedict of Nursia, a small town about seventy miles northeast of Rome. Benedict came from a family with a long tradition of public service in Rome and was sent by his parents to the city for his education. He abandoned this for the solitary life and lived in a cave outside the city for three years. There, dressed in hides (some shepherds who saw him mistook him for a wild animal), and rolling naked in a patch of nettles when tormented by sexual desire, he survived on bread that was lowered down to his cave on a rope by a well-wisher (until one day when the Devil threw a stone and broke the bell the man had tied to the rope as a signal). In the usual manner he attracted disciples and admirers who, drawn by stories of a holy man, were eager to renounce the world. It was then that Benedict conceived the idea of establishing twelve monasteries (the number of the apostles) around a central monastery, in a fashion that resembles the *lavra* of Eastern eremiticism. A local priest jealous of Benedict's goodness and fame tried to poison him, and when that failed, he "sent seven naked girls into the garden of Benedict's monastery where the monks might see them."[9] Benedict set the affairs of the house in order, took several monks with him, and left.

His wanderings and experiments came to an end when he established a community at Monte Cassino, seventy-five miles southeast of Rome, on land that was made over to him by a nobleman, the father of one of his disciples. The place Benedict chose to escape from the world was an ancient fortress atop a mountain ridge on the old military road that ran between Rome and Naples. (He chose well: as noted, Monte Cassino was considered to be "one of the finest defensive positions in Europe" during World War II.)[10] The site occupied an area equivalent to that of a small-sized Roman estate of the classical period, and provided the monks with the necessary mix of arable, woodland, even beehives and a vineyard, to forward the goal of self-sufficiency. Benedict destroyed an image and altar to Apollo and groves of trees dedicated to pagan gods that he found there, and built a chapel dedicated to Saint John and an oratory to Saint Martin, already of "international" fame by the sixth century. This is where he spent the rest of his life, and where he died.

With the *Rule* and the biography of Benedict written by Pope Gregory I, who may be said to have done for Benedict what Athanasius did for Anthony (indeed, Gregory himself called Benedict the "Anthony of Italy"), we can piece together a picture of daily life at the most

trendsetting monastery of early medieval Europe, famous to Roman and barbarian alike: even the Germanic chief, Totila, wanted to meet the miracle worker and took time out from fighting in the Ostrogothic wars against Byzantium to pay a visit to Monte Cassino sometime around 542.

Early monasteries in the West were simple affairs, even in Italy where more classical infrastructure remained than elsewhere. A typical compound consisted of a single-story, small stone building, housing a dozen or so monks with rooms designated for sleeping, eating, and reading, and a simple oratory (Latin *orare*, to pray) or place of prayer, which contained an altar and benches. Lodging for guests and novices, and storage sheds, kitchen, workshops, and outhouses would be attached to or surround this central building. Behind this straightforward arrangement is a concern that the deliberate specialization of space be observed, that a room be used only for its designated purpose: sleeping in the dormitory, eating in the refectory, storing food in the cellar, and so forth, for as Benedict specified in Chapter 52 of his *Rule* (*On the Oratory of the Monastery*): "Let the oratory be what it is called, a place of prayer; and let nothing else be done there or kept there."

The community heard Mass every Sunday (and since neither Benedict nor his monks were ordained priests, they required the help of a priest from outside), and everyone met in the oratory eight separate times every twenty-four hours to say the Divine Office (described later). Since "idleness is the enemy of the soul" everyone was to be occupied at certain times, in manual labor and in reading Scripture and other texts, for they are "truly monks if they live by the labors of their hands; as did also our fathers and the apostles" (#48). Thus, throughout the day the monks engaged alternately in communal prayer, reading, private meditation, and work in the kitchen, garden, or some other homely duty, with time for sleeping and for eating at the common table the one or two meals per day which they received. This simple structure and schedule, inherited mostly from the desert tradition, provided the basis for all later monastic elaborations in the centuries to come, and indeed continue to do so right down to the present day.

With admirable brevity (an English translation of the *Rule* runs to about thirty-five pages), Benedict's *Rule* outlines in a prologue and seventy-three "chapters" or rules how the monastery is to be run, what its residents should do, how they should live, and the spirit that should inform every action of daily life. Because the monastery was a living arrangement centered on the life of the spirit, much of the *Rule* focuses on behavior, on the ritual to be enacted in the many spaces within the monastic compound that will lead to an internal change, a

true "conversion." We get a glimpse of what Benedict himself thought of the fraternal quality and the effect of cenobitical life when he describes a seasoned monk as one who has "been taught by the solace of many," who has been "well prepared in the army of brothers" (#1).

STABILITY AND OBEDIENCE

Benedict would have agreed with Aristotle's famous maxim that "men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting a particular way: you become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions." To these he would have added, "you become obedient by performing obedient actions." (Another one of Aristotle's sayings puts it more succinctly: "We are what we repeatedly do.") Benedict's belief that the interior life depends upon the exterior life is evident in his emphasis on obedience to the Rule and to the abbot: "the first grade of Humility is obedience without delay." The language of the Prologue to the *Rule* speaks repeatedly of belief, action, and the inner person: "clothed then with faith and the performance of good works let us set out on this way"; God "waits for us daily to translate into action his holy teachings"; "we must prepare our hearts and bodies for the battle of holy obedience to his instructions"; "we must run and do now what will profit us forever"; and if one perseveres, "as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments." The chapter entitled *What Are the Instruments of Good Works* (#4) contains a list of seventy-two precepts or commands from the Bible that include the familiar prohibitions against stealing, murder, the works of mercy (e.g., to visit the sick, clothe the naked, bury the dead), and others that are less familiar: do not give way to anger, do not grumble, do not be lazy or drowsy or a great eater, never despair of God's mercy, and so forth. Benedict refers to these teachings as the "tools of the spiritual craft," and he describes the "enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community" as the "workshop in which we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks." The brothers are no longer to "live by their own judgment, giving in to their whims and appetites; rather they walk according to another's decisions and directions, choosing to live in monasteries and to have an abbot over them" (#5).

Within a circumscribed space, the "tools" of an orderly routine, daily work, prayer, and obedience are to be used (in modern language) to crush the self, crush the will, and crush the ego. The monk's object is to achieve the twelfth rung on the ladder of humility, where he will

> not only have humility in his heart but also by his very appearance make it always manifest to those who see him. That is

> to say that whether he is at the Work of God [the Divine Office], in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields or anywhere else, and whether sitting, walking or standing, he should always have his head bowed and his eyes towards the ground.

This attention to what we would call "body language" is apparent elsewhere: the brothers should run to the oratory as soon as the bell sounds for the hour of Divine Service (or for meals), and they should do so in a serious manner, without joking or foolishness (#43).

Benedict placed stability and obedience, in effect the internalization of the virtues that lead to good order, above all others. In the *Rule*, the vows that a newly admitted monk took were promises that he would make "in the oratory, in the presence of all" (#58) to remain in the monastery, to change his manner of life (the real meaning of the word "conversion"), and obey "God and His saints" and the abbot. Stability did not mean simply staying put; it was also a condition of soul and mind. Benedict was deeply disapproving, as was the Master whose Rule he borrowed from, of monks who wandered about and thus violated the central rule of stability, which was to stay in one monastery, preferably the same house where one had taken one's vows. The same ideal was rendered, more humorously, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, some 900 years later, where it is said of the Monk that

> The Rule of good St Benet or St Maur
> As old and strict he tended to ignore;
> He let go by the things of yesterday
> And took the modern world's more spacious way.
> He did not rate that text at a plucked hen
> Which says that hunters are not holy men
> And that a monk uncloistered is a mere
> Fish out of water, flapping on the pier,
> That is to say a monk out of his cloister.
> That was a text he held not worth an oyster.[11]

From the *Rule of the Master* we get a glimpse of this "worst kind of monk" and of fifth- and sixth-century monastic life in an unsettled, even free-wheeling age: monks who live in groups of two or three, acknowledge no head, follow no rule; others who wander about, showing up outside regular communities demanding the best food and drink, claiming to be pilgrims or prisoners escaped from unjust captivity, and pleading exhaustion as an excuse not to say the Night Office (when the real reason is that they do not know the psalms). These freeloaders would then leave, "beating their poor donkey to

make sure of arriving at their new destination in good time for the next meal."[12] It is not hard to understand why some early monastic founders, like Benedict, valued "stability," and yet such wanderings helped to disseminate the monastic idea in the early medieval West, as they had in earlier centuries. Conditions may have compelled some to live such an unsettled life, and not everyone saw it as an abuse anyway. Indeed, Irish monasticism favored wandering as a form of penitential exercise that imitated the wanderings and hardship of Jesus's life on earth. But the fact remains that mainstream monasticism would gradually brand such inherited practice as an abuse.

CLOTHES AND BEDDING

Private possessions of any kind are forbidden (#33): "He should have absolutely not anything, neither a book, nor tablets, nor a pen—nothing at all.—For indeed it is not allowed to the monks to have their own bodies or wills in their own power.… All things shall be common to all." The necessary items, such as clothes, shoes, belt, knife, stylus, needle, handkerchief, work apron, and writing tablets, are to be provided by the abbot. A bed consists of a mat, a woolen blanket, a light cover, and a pillow, and these are to be searched frequently by the abbot in case any monk is hiding personal property (#55). The brothers receive two gowns and two hoods, one set to wear while the other is being washed, a scapular or light short-sleeved garment, and sandals for summer, shoes for winter. The clothes should be made of cloth that is coarse, cheap, and locally available; and when new clothing is issued the old is to be stored in the vestiary or wardrobe and then given to the poor. Brothers leaving the monastery on a journey are to receive a pair of trousers which they are to wash and give back when they return. No one is to leave the confines of the monastery without the abbot's permission (#67), and all are to sleep and dine together, leading a life in common (#22), in the enclosure or "cloister."

THE CLOISTER

The word "cloister" comes from the Latin *claustrum*, meaning a bar, bolt, lock, a place that is locked up, thus an enclosure, an enclosed place. In the monastery, this was (and is) a square-shaped enclosed space bordered on all four sides by a covered walk (we shall look at a monastic plan in detail in Chapter Two). The least expensive way to fashion monastic space was to erect the necessary buildings (church, dormitory, refectory, cellar, and kitchen) to form a square or inner court. This plan allowed easy access to the principal buildings, and

created an enclosed area that fostered a kind of family life, a life in common, a corporate life—and made it easier for abbots or abbesses and their officials to supervise the community. The covered walk provided a place for religious processions and for exercise year-round, and the open area in the middle created a space with plenty of natural light for study, reading, and copying manuscripts: that is, a *schola* (from the Greek word for leisure, a place for lectures, discussion). In a famous passage in the *Rule*, the new foundation at Monte Cassino is described as a "school for the service of the Lord."

Benedict refers to the enclosure (*claustrum*) several times, as in Chapter 4 (cited earlier), where he states that "the workshop in which we shall diligently execute all these tasks [good works] is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community." In Chapter 67, he states that anyone who leaves the "enclosure of the monastery" without an order from the abbot is to be punished. In fact, in his day Monte Cassino did not have a cloister of the sort that would become common throughout Europe over the next two centuries (although as early as 567 a local church council that met in Tours—Saint Martin's old turf—legislated that all monasteries should have a place or *schola* where the monks could meet to study or discuss matters of common concern, under the supervision of the abbot). A cloister was first built at Monte Cassino when the community, after lying in ruins and deserted since the Lombard attack of 577, was rebuilt in the early eighth century. But Benedict's use of the term reminds us that a cloister was not just a physical structure. It was also the spirit of the community and the way it worked to create a place of obedience and stability, a place where a "certain spiritual leisure" was achieved, and a "certain freedom," for "prayer in all its forms."[13]

It is not difficult to understand why, by the eighth century, the cloister became a standard feature of monasteries everywhere, indeed a symbol of the monastic life. It answered to so many needs, especially providing the protection and seclusion from the outside that were essential to the individual monk's withdrawal from the world and his search for God. It also created an "isolation inherent in the buildings themselves" where the rule of silence "isolated monks from each other," creating a "controlled and impersonal environment."[14] It is here, in this little school, that one could be "taught by the solace of many."

THE DIVINE OFFICE

At the heart of this highly structured and enclosed life was prayer, not only by the individual monk or nun, but also by the community at fixed times throughout the day. In fact prayer provided the basic framework of daily life, in the institution known as the Divine Office

or the *opus Dei* ("God's work"), whose "workshop" was the oratory of the community. These were the appointed times during the day, seven daytime offices and one nighttime vigil, when the community came together for prayer in the oratory, a tradition inspired by two verses from Psalm 119, "Seven times in the day do I praise Thee" and "At midnight I arose to confess unto Thee."[15] The recitation of public prayers at dawn and dusk everyday had long been practiced at many large urban churches, and by the sixth-century monasteries had developed it further, into a regular round of eight offices recited every day. Benedict devotes more detailed discussion to this institution than any other (#8–19).

Benedict's "day" was the Roman "day," that is, he followed the system for reckoning time that was used in the ancient world, by which the day (sunrise to sunset) was divided into twelve equal periods ("hours"), and the night (sunset to sunrise) was divided into twelve equal "hours." The hours of the day and night were the same length, that is, 60 minutes, only at the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, March 25 and September 24. From March 25 to September 24 each day-hour contained more than sixty minutes, and each night-hour contained less; and from September 24 to March 25 each of the twelve hours of the night had more than sixty minutes and each day-hour had less. Further, since the times of sunrise and sunset depend on latitude, the length of day- and night-hours differed from one region to the next. For example, in central Italy where Monte Cassino was located, at midsummer (June 24) each of the twelve hours of the day was actually seventy-five minutes long, and each of the twelve hours of the night was forty-five minutes long. What was always fixed was that the first of the seven daytime prayers, Lauds (Latin *laudare*, to praise) had to begin at dawn, and the last of the daytime prayers, Compline (Latin *completa hora*, last hour) had to be recited at dusk, so that the brothers could get to bed before it got dark, and so that the schedule could in fact fulfill the words of Scripture, "seven times *a day* do I praise thee." In between Lauds and Compline were the four rather short and frequent offices, at the first, third, sixth, and ninth hours, followed by the office of Vespers (Latin, *vesper*, evening). Compline was sung at sundown. This left one night office, Nocturns (also called Vigils, and later Matins), the longest and most elaborate of the hours of prayer: it was divided into sections called "nocturns," and each nocturn included the recitation of six psalms, a versicle (short prayer), possibly a blessing by the abbot, and four readings from the Bible with a responsory after each reading. Vigils on weekdays included two nocturns but Sundays throughout the year had three nocturns (ending with hymns and another blessing), and probably took close to two hours to complete. By contrast, the office of Prime on Mondays

included an opening verse, a hymn, the reading of Psalms 1, 2, and 6, followed by one reading and concluding prayers.[16]

Saint Benedict of Nursia prays with monks, fresco, c. 1500. (The Art Archive/Corbis)

In the spring and summer, the schedule would look something like this:

Nocturns, the night office, at 2:00 or 3:00 A.M.
Lauds at first light
Prime (the First hour) at 6:00 (sunrise)
Terce (the Third hour) at 9:00
Sext (the Sixth hour) at 12:00 noon
None (pronounced to rhyme with 'bone') (the Ninth hour) at 3:00 p.m.
Vespers at 6:00 P.M.
Compline at dusk, about 8:00

After Compline the monks went straight to bed and were up again for Nocturns in about six or seven hours. Benedict gave instructions about which prayers were to be said, which hymns sung, which texts read during the Night and Morning Offices, and the six remaining hours, varying with time of year and saints' days, and so forth, with the basic requirement that all 150 psalms (the Psalter) be recited each week, beginning every Sunday at the Night Office. As always, when it comes

to details, Benedict establishes a regimen that is workable and takes account of human nature: in Chapter 43, *Concerning those who come late to Divine Service*, Benedict orders that the last recitation of the nightly prayer, the *Gloria* of Psalm 94, is to be sung "quite lingeringly and with delay," so that anyone coming late will not miss the entire service. To avoid disrupting others, however, the latecomer should not take his usual place in the choir, but rather should step just inside the oratory—for if he remains outside he might go back to bed.

The time was calculated using water clocks, sundials, or hourglasses, or by observation of the night sky, and someone had to stay awake all night in order to get everybody else up at the correct time. In the *Rule of the Master*, it is specified that two monks are charged with this task (in case one of them falls asleep), and when the time comes to wake the community up for prayer, they go to the abbot's bed and say "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise" (Psalm 51:15), and tap his feet gently until he wakes up.[17]

OTHER MONASTIC LABORS

The frequency of the day offices, or hours of prayer, and the time set aside for daily private reading and meditation meant that a monk was praying, off and on, almost all day long. All of the other labors and responsibilities of monastic life were fitted in around this schedule of communal prayer. After Nocturns, in fact, the monks did not go back to bed but could use the intervening time until Lauds to brush up on the Psalter or the readings (#6), especially during the long winter night "hours." After Lauds at first light came Prime at sunrise, and the monks would then process out of the church and begin the day's routine.

In Chapter 48 *On the Daily Manual Labor*, which begins with the observation that "idleness is the enemy of the soul," Benedict prescribes the daily "fixed hours" for "sacred reading" and manual labor. He divides up the year and its work as follows:

From Easter to October 1: after Prime to the fourth hour, manual labor, then from the fourth to the sixth hour, reading; after the sixth hour, the brothers eat and then may rest on their beds "in perfect silence" or read quietly; after None manual labor until Vespers.

From October 1 to the beginning of Lent: reading to the end of the second hour, then Terce, then manual labor until None, then a meal, followed by reading.

During Lent: from morning until the end of the third hour, reading, then manual labor until the end of the tenth hour. At the beginning of Lent, everyone is to receive a book from the library, which they are to "read straight through from the beginning."

On Sundays: those who have duties to fulfill should perform them; everyone else is to read. Anyone too "negligent or shiftless" to read should work.

We see that for Benedict, monastic labor included the "reading of sacred works," which meant "total immersion in the Word of God."[18] At its deepest level, reading was meant to provide food for private prayer, thus it was meditative and contemplative in orientation. In the monastery one read deeply rather than widely, reading and rereading over a lifetime, to understand, memorize, and ponder levels of meaning. Thus, reading was equivalent to contemplation, a sort of meditating upon the texts and assimilating them, so that their contents became more than something that one knew, but also a way of thinking and understanding. Monastic reading might give the reader information, but that was not its purpose; rather, it aimed to lead the monastic to "wisdom and appreciation."[19] The standard works that Benedict himself recommended for his monks to read included the Bible, Cassian, the *Rule* of Saint Basil and the writings of the Church Fathers. His own *Rule*, of course, was to be read aloud frequently ("so that none of the brethren may excuse himself on the ground of ignorance" [#66]); but above all the monk was to read the Bible for, as Benedict himself declares (#73), "What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?"[20]

Were we to walk into a room full of monks at Monte Cassino engaged in private reading, we would have been struck by the loud humming sound produced by everyone reading softly aloud, for this "prayerful reading" was active: one saw the word, said it aloud, and heard it. Saying the words aloud created a "muscular" and an aural memory of them, "inscribing the sacred text in the body and in the soul." This process was described by the Latin term *ruminatio* (rumination, i.e., chewing), referring to the "repeated mastication" of the divine words. So "to meditate is to attach oneself closely to the sentence being recited and weigh all its words in order to sound the depths of their full meaning. It means assimilating the content of a text by means of a kind of mastication which releases its full flavor."[21] The text is repeated over and over again, learned by heart, and then could be repeated from memory—this is *meditation.* Augustine, a century and a half before Benedict, refers to this very practice in Chapter 2 of his brief *Rule:* "when you pray to God in Psalms and hymns, think over in your hearts the words that come from your lips."

The goal of reading and contemplation was to bring about a true conversion, a topic that deeply concerned Benedict, who ruled that when a novice is received at the end of the first year, he must "in the oratory, in the presence of all, make promise concerning his steadfastness and *the change in his manner of life* and his obedience to God and to His saints" (#58). In the final chapter (#73), Benedict stresses that his Rule shows those who observe it how to have the

"beginning of conversion," and that those who wish to make further progress should read the works of the Fathers and Scripture; thus he envisions a lifetime of contemplation, prayer, and reading.

While Benedict assumes that most monks will be able to read, it is clear from the chapter on receiving new members (#58) that he expected some might not be able to write. (This would not be unusual, since reading and writing were seen as separate skills in the Middle Ages, and were not necessarily taught to children at the same time, as they are today. Further, the widespread use of scribes meant that someone who read and perhaps even spoke Latin fluently might not be able to write, or not to write easily, mostly because he or she would not need to). When someone seeks admission to the monastery at the end of the one-year novitiate (during which the *Rule* has been read to him several times "so that he may know on what he is entering"), he must promise before all to obey the Rule and draw up a "petition in the name of the Saints whose relics are there and of the Abbot who is present" in his own hand; if he does not "know his letters" then someone else is to write it for him, but he must still make his own mark upon it and with his own hand lay it upon the altar. This ritual, performed before all, underscores the new member's voluntary offer of himself to God.

Manual labor promoted the goal of self-sufficiency, and strengthened the virtues of obedience and asceticism. Monks worked in the fields, kitchen, garden, cellar (storeroom), workshop, bakery, or at "some craft" (#46), interspersed with the regular interruptions for the four day-hours (Prime through None) when all would return to the oratory for common prayer. They ate a dinner at noon in the summer, and in mid-afternoon in winter, and had a second meal, supper, in the evening in summertime. Each monk received a pound of bread per day and some wine, and at the main meal two cooked dishes were provided ("so that he who cannot eat one kind of food may be able to make his meal of the other," #39); fruit or vegetables might make a third dish, if they were available. Fish and eggs were allowed, but only sick or weak brethren were to eat meat. Exceptions were also made for children and the elderly (#37 *On Old Men and Children*), who were not to be held to the "rigor of the Rule" respecting diet, but should be allowed to eat more and eat sooner if necessary. All should embrace frugality and deny themselves whenever possible; but it always lay within the abbot's discretion to increase the food allowance as he saw fit.

Saint Benedict with his monks at table. (Alfredo Dagli Orti/The Art Archive/Corbis)

Like peasants, in short, the brothers were up before the sun and went to bed with the sun; in fact, apart from one or two known exceptions, the monks at Monte Cassino in Benedict's day were laymen of humble background, including emancipated slaves; these people were accustomed to manual labor. Thus, Benedict wrote the *Rule* for "working people," not scholars or clerics. The early medieval monastery was in essence a rural retreat for the cultivation of personal devotion, in many ways a product of peasant culture, and the life within its walls, its few comforts, regular schedule, and physical labor, would have been familiar to the majority of sixth-century Europeans. One scholar calculates the allocation of time per day in summertime as follows:[22]

Divine Office	3½ hours
Private prayer	½ hour
Reading	4 hours
Work	6½ hours
Sleep	8½ hours (includes a nap after

	the midday meal, until 3:00 P.M.)
Meals	1 hour
	24 hours

There was no recreation, no time unaccounted for, and no unsupervised time. The provision that brother shall not "join brother at unsuitable times" (#48) reflects a preoccupation with prohibiting homosexual relations, what monastic leaders sometimes called "special friendships." The common dormitory had no separate rooms, no partitions, and a candle was to be kept burning all night. The brothers were to sleep in separate beds, fully clothed and belted, but were not to wear their knives at their sides lest in a dream they wound someone else. Boys were not to sleep all together in the same area, but to be interspersed throughout the room, near senior monks who were to keep an eye on them. There was no privacy and not much talk either, since "monks ought to be zealous for silence at all times" (#42). No talking was allowed after Compline, or during meals, when the reader's should be the only voice heard. The only times that one would hear the sustained human voice, or use one's own very much, would have been during the Divine Office, meetings in the chapter house, and public readings. Such a regimen was intended, as one scholar has noted, to "keep the monk's mind constantly filled with the Word of God and [to shape] the whole of his inner psychology and outward activity."[23] These are the basic working parts of the Benedictine success story.

A "TOTAL INSTITUTION"…

Benedict had a healthy regard for regulation and external constraints because he believed they could change the inner person and bring about a true "conversion," which he desired above all else. Regulation began with the physical layout of the monastic compound, as he indicated in a famous provision about self-sufficiency (#66):

> If it can be done, the monastery should be so established that all the necessary things, such as water, mill, garden and various workshops, may be within the enclosure, so that there is no necessity for the monks to wander about outside, since that is not at all good for their souls.

This containment is one reason why some have characterized the medieval monastery as "totalitarian" and placed it alongside prisons, psychiatric hospitals, concentration camps, and boarding schools as an example of a "total institution," a place where "a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable amount of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered

round of life."[24] Even if people join voluntarily, their relationship with their superiors is marked by coercion and they lose all control over their lives. They are "trained for deference," with every moment of the day planned for them by someone else. In a process referred to as "mortification," individuals are divested of the clothes, ornaments, and personal possessions which they used "to define themselves in everyday life" and are given standard uniforms to enforce the cohesion of the group. They are deprived of "social privacy" since they live, sleep, and dine together, and they are constantly subjected to a system of surveillance to ensure conformity to the rules.[25]

Every detail of this description of a "total institution" corresponds to some provision in the Benedictine code. We have seen that most of the waking hours are devoted to some prescribed activity, with attendance at service and time reserved for reading and work. The monks sleep together in one room with several "elders" to watch over them (#22). Other forms of supervision are provided for, as in Chapter 48: "above all there shall certainly be appointed one or two elders, who shall go round the monastery at the hours in which the brothers are engaged in reading, and see to it that no troublesome brother chance to be found who is open to idleness and trifling." Beds are to be frequently searched in case anyone is concealing private possessions (#55).

The conventual grounds, as we have seen, conform to the need for surveillance and the maintenance of discipline, with a gate-keeper lodged near the entrance to the enclosure to watch all comings and goings (#66). No one is permitted to leave the monastery precincts without permission of the superior, and conversation with outsiders is forbidden unless the abbot or an appointed proxy is present (#66, 67). When a novice enters the community, he undergoes a process much like "mortification," exchanging his usual clothes for a monastic tunic and rope belt. Altogether, such regulations seem to add up to a medieval and monastic version of modern-day "total institutions."

Yet elsewhere in the *Rule* we read that the new member's old clothes are to be "placed in the vestiary to be preserved; so that if, at any time, the devil persuading him, he shall consent to go forth from the monastery—may it not happen—then, taking off the garments of the monastery, he may be cast out" (#58). A disobedient and stubborn monk can be expelled from the monastery (#71), following a "three strikes" system (#29):

> *Whether brothers who leave the monastery ought again to be received.* A brother who goes out, or is cast out, of the monastery for his own fault, if he wishes to return, shall first promise every amends for the fault.… But if he again departs, up to the third time he

shall be received. Knowing that after this every opportunity of return is denied to him.

Benedict was not interested in forcing anyone to adopt the monastic way of life. He believed in the "common life," the cenobitic tradition, which taught that the "solace of many" helped the individual monk to pursue an arduous way of life; his deepest interest was in the inner person, as is evident from the famous opening lines of the Prologue to the *Rule:* "Listen, my son, to the teachings of your master, and *incline the ear of your heart.*" He continues, speaking to the willing: "To you my words are now addressed, whoever you may be, who are *renouncing your own will* to do battle under the Lord Christ … and *are taking up the strong, bright weapons of obedience*" (emphases added). "Let us arise then at last for the Scripture stirs us up, saying, 'now is the hour for us to rise from sleep'" (a fitting admonition for the monk), and "Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." "Who is the man who yearns for life, and desires to see good days?"[26]

… OR BENEDICTINE DEMOCRACY?

If Monte Cassino was not a "total institution," what was it? How was it to be governed, day in and day out? How was power understood, who made the "laws," who had the responsibility to enforce them? The question is a complicated one, for while the *Rule* might seem to be a complete "how to" book on establishing a monastery, it is not nor was it intended to be. Benedict himself described it as a "minimum rule written for beginners" (#73) and left plenty of room for local variation. One indication of his scheme's basic flexibility appears in the manner in which official positions were filled in the monastery: some were chosen by general election (abbot, deans), others by rotation (the weekly reader, kitchen help), still others by appointment by the abbot (provost or prior).

We must start with the abbot (from *abba*, the Aramaic word meaning "father," another trace of the eastern origins of monastic practice), whose election, character, and responsibilities are discussed at length in the *Rule* (#2 *What Kind of Man the Abbot should be, #3 On Calling the Brethren for Counsel*, and #64 *On Constituting an Abbot*). The abbot is understood to be Christ's representative, and is repeatedly warned to remember that on the Day of Judgment he will be called to answer for how well he has discharged his office, that his teaching and the obedience of his disciples will be "weighed in the balance." He should rule more by deeds than words, adapt his teaching and discipline to the abilities of each individual, and seek to be loved rather than feared. The abbot is the absolute head of his community, and is to be

elected by the "whole congregation … with one heart," or chosen by a smaller group of brethren "if their counsel is more wholesome." Before he makes a decision, he must call together the whole community for advice on any important matter (a smaller group may suffice for less important matters), because God may reveal to the youngest what is best to do—and, as it is written in the Scriptures, "Do everything with counsel, and you will not repent it afterwards" (#3).

The congregation, especially if it is a large one, is to elect deans, "brothers of good standing," to assist the abbot in administration (#21). The entire population was to be divided into decuries or decanates, that is, groups of ten, in which the tenth person (*decanus*, the "dean") was to "watch over" the other nine. The deans are to be elected for their personal merit and wisdom; if they become "puffed up by pride" they are to be warned in the usual "three strikes" manner and if they fail to mend their ways, then deposed. This institution in the monastery parallels the tithing system found in rural communities all over Europe, in which villages would require all males over the age of twelve to belong to a "tithing" (cf. tenth) group under a chief tithing man. Like a modern-day crime-watch association, the members of the group were charged with the task of neighborhood vigilance, watching out for each other, even keeping each other in line (in fact, when the Latin *Rule* was translated into Old English, the word *decanus* was rendered as "tithing-elder"). Like the tithing system in the village, the "decanal" system in the monastery has the effect of diffusing responsibility throughout the community, among brothers elected to that post and hence removable from it. In this way, as Benedict observes, "with the duties being shared by several, no one person will become proud" (#65). Although Benedict thinks it best that the Abbot have the "full administration of the monastery" and that its affairs be "administered by deans according to the Abbot's directions," a prior or provost, that is, a deputy of the abbot, may be chosen by the latter with the counsel of trustworthy brothers if he so wishes. The provost is to do whatever the abbot asks him to do. Benedict is concerned that the provost be kept in his place, not think of himself as equal to the abbot, and not become inflated with pride and act as a sort of second abbot, to the confusion of all, for from that "arise envy, quarrels, detractions, emulations, dissensions, and disturbances"—trouble, in short.

Further light is shed on the means used to achieve good government in the monastery in Chapter 63 *On the Order of the Community:* the brothers were to "keep their places [rank] in the monastery" according to the date they entered, the merit of their lives, and the abbot's decision. (Rank would affect such matters as where one stood

in the choir, or in what order one received communion). Age, birth, and status are not relevant: "He who came to the monastery at the second hour of the day, whatever be his age or his dignity, must know that he is junior to one who came at the first hour of the day" (although boys are to be "kept under discipline in all matters and by everyone"). An older monk should call a younger one "Brother," and the younger should call the elder "Father," while the Abbot is to be called "Lord and Abbot." In social matters juniors must show deference for age (e.g., give their seat to an elder, ask for his blessing if they meet), but in spiritual matters a different hierarchy prevails: when one entered the monastery.

The system described in the *Rule* is neither totalitarian nor democratic: its key features suggest a community where each monk has a responsibility to everyone else, a part to play, and a chance to participate in collective decision-making. As we have seen, entrance is usually voluntary, with a lengthy novitiate and plenty of opportunities to leave, and one can be expelled for disobedience and denied reentry. When the entire community meets, it meets as a deliberative body. Office-holding is "open to talent," and some offices are filled by election, some by rotation, and some by abbatial designation. Merit has to be earned, it is not simply ascribed; and all are to some extent charged with enforcement. This straightforward but modified hierarchy, where power and responsibility are diffused, where the Abbot sits at the apex of the pyramid but is dependent on advice and consent, mirrors the society of the early medieval West.

THE CELLARER

Let us look at Benedict's detailed and thoughtful provisions for one extremely important monastic official, the cellarer, the man in charge of the kitchen, and for those who assist him as weekly helpers in the kitchen (#31 and #35). The cellarer is to be elected by the congregation (i.e., not appointed by the abbot), and he is to be a wise and mature person—also, notably, one "not given to much eating." He is to care for all, the sick, the young, guests, and the poor who come to the monastery begging alms, being mindful that "he shall render account for all of these at the day of judgment" (the same language used in describing the abbot's responsibility). The cellarer is to give the brethren their "fixed measure of food" without haughtiness or delay; if anyone makes an unreasonable request, he is to "deny him who wrongly seeks" but "reasonably, with humility"; and, envisioning the scarcities that often occurred, "when there is nothing substantial for him to give, let a good word of reply be offered, as it is written: *a good word is above the best gift.*" If the congregation is large, he is to have assistants; and the entire community is to take turns serving in

the kitchen (only the sick or those engaged in some special work are to be excused from cooking) because "by this means, charity and a greater reward are acquired," that is, one derives spiritual benefit from serving others. Those who are weak will be given assistants so that they too may serve, and thus not lose the opportunity to acquire that "greater reward." Doing the most ordinary work is necessary—and elevating.

RITUAL IN DAILY LIFE

Throughout the *Rule*, instruction is accompanied by moral and spiritual precepts, that is, the proper behavior and duties are described, as are the beliefs and rituals that should accompany them. In this way, Benedict elevates the mundane, just as he elevates manual labor: "All the utensils of the monastery, and all its substance, [the cellarer] shall look upon as though they were the sacred vessels of the altar" (the same spirit evident in one of the sayings of the Desert Mothers, and in the remark of a modern nun that "all work done in the monastery is done for the glory of God—even washing dishes").[27]

Benedict wishes to surround every aspect of daily life in Monte Cassino with a spirit of reverence, an awareness of God's presence in the monastery. Ritual is essential to do this, as may be seen in the "procedure" to be followed when a brother receives or surrenders the office of weekly cook. It takes place in the oratory, like the Divine Office (and we recall Benedict's insistence that the oratory should be a place of prayer, and that nothing else should be done or kept there): on Saturday, at the end of his week, the cook is to wash the towels used to wipe the hands or feet, and to give back the "vessels of his ministry clean and whole" to the cellarer, who will then give them to the cook for the following week. After the first morning prayer in the oratory on Sunday, the following day, both incoming and outgoing officers are to prostrate themselves at the feet of all, "begging to be prayed for"; and he who is finishing his week repeats three times the verse *Blessed art Thou O Lord God, who hast aided and consoled me*, and then receives a blessing. The brother just taking up his duties shall follow and say *O God come to my aid, O Lord hasten to help me*, which is to be repeated three times by all, and then he receives the blessing, whereupon he is fully vested with his office (#35).

Thus, as we have seen so far, the monastic day was filled with rituals: the Divine Office itself (#8–20), the admission of new members (#58), the giving and receiving of blessings (#25), etc. A ritual is never merely a symbolic act, but must be understood, in the monastic setting, as a "disciplinary practice that aided the cultivation of Christian virtues."[28] Monastic ritual must be enacted in complete obedience and in a willingness to serve, to be lowest and last. The

prayers, the kiss of peace, bowing of the head, and washing of the feet that are to accompany the reception of a guest are infinitely more than acts of courtesy: first and foremost, all guests are to be "received as though they were Christ: for He Himself said: I was a stranger and you took Me in"; in receiving the poor and people on pilgrimage "the greatest care and solicitude should be shown, because it is especially in them that Christ is received" (#53).

The rituals found on every page of the *Rule* were as much the building blocks of Monte Cassino as the ancient fortress walls within which the monastery took shape. Rituals constructed the environment and the social relationships in it, they governed and stabilized the community because they built power relationships, eased transitions, and promoted cooperation and a common outlook. As a rule of thumb, we might say that where we see ritual, we see what matters most to a community: in the monastery, this means the work by which "one's way of life and one's faith progress [so that] the heart becomes broadened, and … the path of God's commandments is traversed" (Prologue). As one historian has observed, the "inner *persona* of the monk or nun was shaped by the outer ceremonies and signs."[29]

EVIDENCE FROM GREGORY'S BIOGRAPHY OF BENEDICT

In 593–594 Pope Gregory I, a former monk himself, wrote a "life" of Benedict, his near contemporary. Gregory's biography is our most important source for any details of the life of Benedict: it was written within fifty years of his death, and was based on other written sources (that have not survived) and on stories about Benedict from people who had known him. Thus, it fleshes out the evidence of the *Rule* and shows the actual working of some of its provisions, giving us a tiny glimpse of the daily regimen at Monte Cassino in the time of the founder.

Some of the details Gregory provides bring this period of destruction and disorder eerily to life, as when he comments on how "more often all the time we see Roman buildings, wearied with old age, collapsing into ruins" (#15).[30] He tells the story of the "humble Goth" who "came to adopt the religious life and Benedict willingly received him" (6); and how Benedict's prophecy of the destruction of Monte Cassino proved to be true, "for we know that his monastery has just been destroyed by the Lombards" (17). Links with the outside world and with local people appear in a reference to a village near Monte Cassino where many people "had been converted by Benedict's teaching from idolatry to belief in God" (19). One of the monks, whose name was Valentinian, had a brother who was a devout layman and who "had formed the habit of traveling from his home to the monastery every year to receive Benedict's blessing and to see his

brother" (13). Another layman burdened by debt comes to the monastery for a loan (27). We learn of famines that fell "upon that region of Campania," and how, in one instance, Benedict gave all the food in the monastery away to the needy (21, 28). When a devout layman asked him to send some monks to build a monastery on his estate near Terracina (about thirty miles southeast of Rome) Benedict did so, appointed two of them as abbot and prior for the new community, and even sent them (in a dream) complete instructions on where to situate each building of the monastery (22).

Gregory's biography also allows us to consider the personal encounters that occurred in the course of an ordinary day. Perhaps Benedict's old habits as a hermit died hard, because he seems to have spent much of his time alone in his cell (or, as on one occasion, sitting alone at the entrance to the monastery, reading [31]): Gregory relates several stories of monks entering his room and finding him at prayer and private meditation, as when a young monk was crushed by a falling wall during the building of Monte Cassino and the brothers ran to get Benedict's help (11), or when a nobleman who had embraced the monastic life because of Benedict's instruction came to his cell and found him weeping (he had just foreseen the destruction of Monte Cassino) (17). A monk who "had become unstable in spirit" continually asked Benedict to let him leave the monastery and made such a nuisance of himself that Benedict "angrily ordered him to leave" (25), a story that has a real ring of authenticity to it! The rituals of giving and receiving multiple blessings (blessing those you pass, blessing the food you hand out as kitchen server, receiving a blessing from the abbot whenever one leaves the monastery on some errand, or returns to it, receiving a blessing from the abbot during the Divine Office, etc.) are represented, as in the story of the young monk "who loved his parents too much" and left the monastery without a blessing (24). We must try to imagine the kind of living environment created by the flow of blessings that accompanied the most ordinary activities.

Chapter 20 in Gregory's biography, entitled *How the Man of God Was Aware of a Monk's Proud Thought*, paints a picture of the kind of interpersonal conflicts that were probably more common in the monastery than were incidents of explosive confrontation, rebelliousness, or outright flouting of the abbot's authority.

> One day while the abbot was taking his evening meal, the monk holding the lamp for him at table was the son of a certain official. As Benedict was eating and he stood by tending the lamp, he silently began to be agitated by a spirit of pride and to say in his thoughts, "Who is he that I should attend him while he eats and

serve him by holding the lamp? Who am I that I should be his servant?" The man of God turned to him at once in sharp reproach. "Mark you heart with the sign of the cross, my brother. What are you saying? Mark you heart." Benedict immediately called the monks and ordered them to remove the lamp from the man's hands. He also commanded the monk to give up his assigned duty and to sit quietly by himself for that hour.

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE MONASTERY IN THE WEST

The Benedictine Rule is "a difficult rule to keep, but not impossible, and therein lies its genius."[31] It provided the blueprint for thousands of monasteries in the West for centuries. Movements for monastic reform were frequently driven by the ideal of "getting back" to the pristine *Rule*, observing its every detail just as had been done at Monte Cassino in Benedict's day. In a time of violence and insecurity, the daily schedule was to be followed in a spirit of even-handedness, moderation, and flexibility, pursuing a serious purpose in a humane manner. In fact Benedict must have envisioned that at times daily life in the monastery would promote a degree of ease, of pleasure in human companionship, that might result in too much talking and "idle jesting," since he suggests that, for Lent, each brother should refrain from such behavior and from food, drink, and sleep, over and above what is required of him; as the brothers "look forward to holy Easter," let them do so with a different kind of joy, the "joy of spiritual desire."

Benedict's vision, according to one historian, is a "link between the early Middle Ages and our own. For in many regions of the world today there are communities of monks calling themselves after his name, living by his Rule and constantly studying it and reciting it."[32]

NOTES

1. "Monks at large" is David Knowles's phrase for Jerome. See *Christian Monasticism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 25.
2. *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Thomson/Gale; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003), p. 791.
3. Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1913), p. 37.
4. G. G. Coulton, "Interpretation of Visitation Documents," *English Historical Review* xxxix (1914): 16–40; quotation at p. 17.
5. Numbers in parentheses refer to chapter numbers in the *Rule.*
6. Cited in Frederick G. Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 69.
7. Cited in Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 133.
8. There are numerous English translations of the *Rule of St Benedict*, including

online: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/benedict/rule2/files/rule2.html#prologue. The translations used here are those by Timothy Fry, *Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981); William C. McDermott and Edward Peters, eds., *Monks, Bishops, and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy, 500–700: Sources in Translation, Including the World of Gregory of Tours* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975); and Leonard Doyle, *St Benedict's Rule for Monasteries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1948).

9. Myra L. Uhlfelder, trans., *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great, Book Two: Saint Benedict* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967). Chapter 8, in Gregory the Great's biography of Benedict (discussed later in the chapter).

10. Matthew Parker, *Monte Cassino: The Hardest Fought Battle of WW II* (New York: Anchor, 2005), p. xiv.

11. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, trans. Nevill Coghill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 24.

12. Peter King, paraphrasing the *Rule of the Master*, in *Western Monasticism: A History of the Monastic Movement in the Latin Church* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1999), p. 84.

13. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture.* 12th Printing (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 19.

14. William M. Johnston, ed., *Encyclopedia of Monasticism* (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), vol. A, p. 304.

15. The following discussion of the monastic hours follows Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule.* 2nd ed. (1924; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), pp. 275–87; and C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages.* 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, Inc., 2001), pp. 28–32.

16. The entire schedule of hymns, prayers, and readings for the Divine Office throughout the year as laid down by Benedict is given in an outline in Fry, *Rule of St Benedict*, pp. 390–7.

17. Cited in Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 32.

18. Fry, *Rule of St Benedict*, p. 86.

19. This discussion of monastic reading draws on Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, Chapter 5, "Sacred Learning," esp. pp. 72–3.

20. Fry, *Rule of St Benedict*, pp. 295, 297.

21. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p. 73.

22. Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*, p. 287.

23. Fry, *Rule of St Benedict*, p. 95.

24. Donald Light and Suzzane Infeld Keller, *Sociology* (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. 277, citing the work of Erving Goffman.

25. Light and Keller, *Sociology*, pp. 277–9.

26. The citations from Scripture are, respectively, Rom 13:11, Ps 94:8, and Ps 33:13.

27. Photocopy of a talk given by Mother Christophora, Abbess, Orthodox Monastery of the Transformation, Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, at Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in 1991.

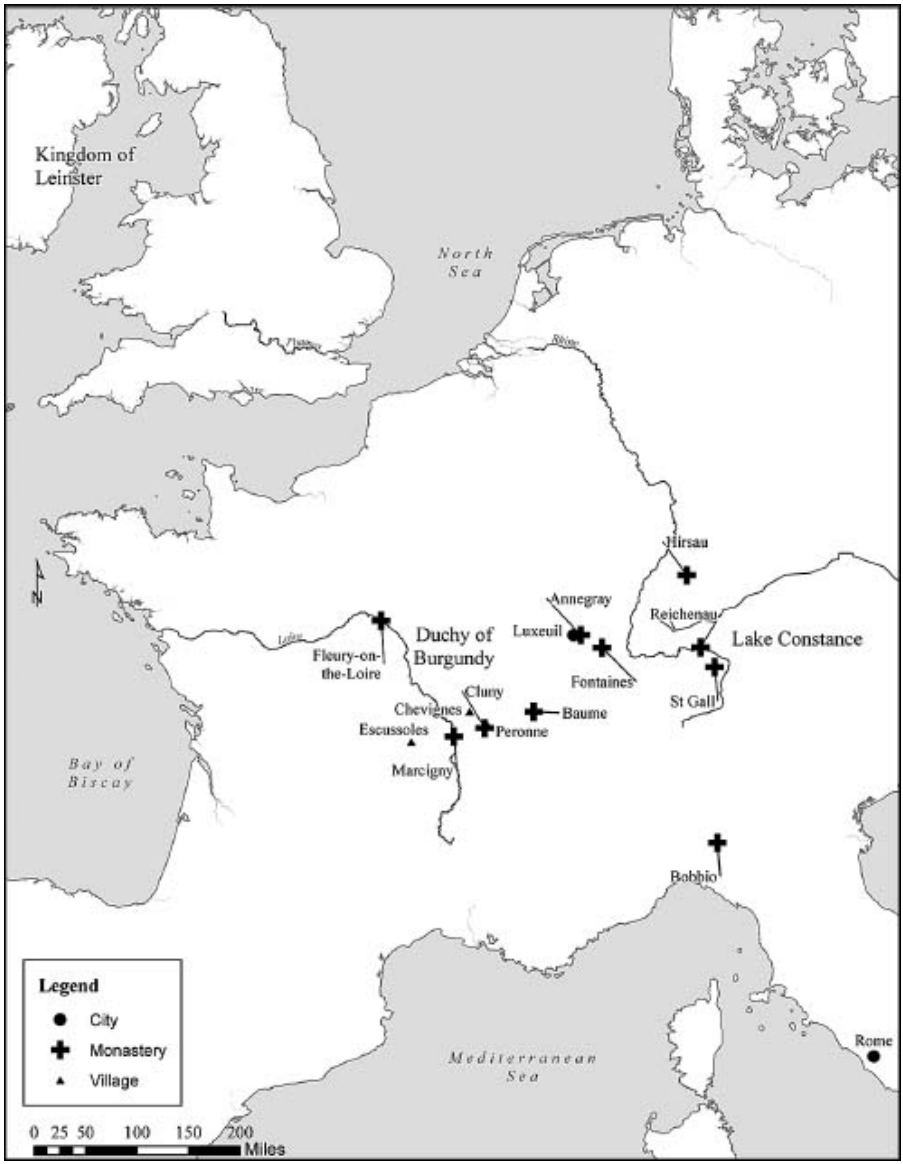
28. William S. Sax, citing Talad Asad in *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 5.

29. Giles Constable, ed., "Entering Religious Life," in *Culture and Spirituality* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), p. 833.

30. Uhlfelder, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great*.

31. Christopher Brooke, *Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2003), p. 48.

32. Brooke, *Age of the Cloister*, p. 51.



Foundations of St. Columbanus; Cluny and some of its holdings (University of Connecticut Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center [MAGIC])

2

THE MONASTERY IN AN AGE OF INVASION AND REFORM: SAINT GALL AND CLUNY

In this chapter we shift to a new phase in monastic history, an age of both invasion and reform, and to the story of two monasteries that embody that time. We have seen that Benedict's own monastery was deserted for nearly a century-and-a-half after the Lombard attacks: it was rebuilt in the early 700s, but in 883 it was burned to the ground and the entire community massacred by Saracen raiders ("Saracen" being the term often used in the West for Muslims). Again the site was deserted, this time for about sixty years, and there is little evidence that any monastery anywhere was following the Benedictine Rule; it is almost as if the Rule had gone underground. In the seventh century monks from northern France came to Monte Cassino, found it a deserted ruin, dug up Benedict's remains and those of his sister, Saint Scholastica, and took them back to their monastery at Fleury-on-the-Loire (whether these were really the remains of the two saints has been disputed ever since)—and yet Fleury followed a mixed rule, not the Benedictine or any other single rule. Even in Rome the most we can say is that Benedict's *Rule* was known, but no monastery there was following it to the exclusion of all others until the tenth century. Gregory's biography kept Benedict's name alive and contributed to his reputation as a great monk and a holy man, but for many years his *Rule* was only one among many different monastic traditions that could be and were freely "mixed and matched."

In this period of many different practices, a new ingredient was added to the mix with the arrival of missionaries from Ireland who brought with them the more rigorous practices of Irish monasticism. Most famous among them was Saint Columbanus who came to the continent in the 590s, and whose monastic Rule is the earliest surviving Irish rule we have. Together with a number of "disciples" he was received at the court of King Childebert of Burgundy, founded several monasteries in the Vosges mountains (Annegray, Luxeuil, Fontaines) in the eastern Frankish realm, and then moved on, apparently chased out by two groups whom he had managed to antagonize: members of the royal court angered by his criticism of the

king's extramarital relationships, and local bishops who did not appreciate his publicly stated view that monasteries should be free of episcopal control. Together with his followers, Columbanus continued to establish monasteries and hermitages, including (as we shall see) Saint Gall on Lake Constance. In northern Italy he founded his last monastery, Bobbio, and died there in 615.

Columbanus's foundations shared the same basic features of Western monastic practice in this period—individual poverty, life in common under the guidance of an abbot, manual labor, and daily communal prayer—although the discipline meted out for small daily infractions was more severe than Benedict would have ordered: for not saying "Amen" after grace at the table, six blows (a blow was a strike with a leather strap upon the hand); for not blessing the lamp when it is lit by a junior, six blows; smiling during the Divine Office, six blows; using the words "mine" or "yours," six blows; cutting the table with a knife, ten blows; forgetting the prayer before or after work, twelve blows; speaking unnecessarily loudly, coming late or noisily to prayers, or contradicting a senior monk, fifty blows.[1]

But the balance was beginning to shift away from the freewheeling age of the mixed rule, and toward the predominance of Benedictine monasticism. With the continued Christianization of Europe and the internalization of Christian values, people from all walks of life increasingly turned to the Church in the hope of salvation. At the same time, Frankish kings and other members of the ruling elite who were struggling to establish their power bases found it useful to ally themselves with the Church to promote reform—and to control it. These developments would affect the monastic way of life.

It was at this point that a Visigothic nobleman by the name of Witiza (d. 821) entered the religious life, studied Gregory's biography of Saint Benedict, and became an enthusiastic advocate of the Rule. His talents were noticed by King Louis the Pious (r. 814–840), who recruited him to oversee monastic reform in the Frankish state and "update" the *Rule*. His chief innovation was to increase the amount of time the monks spent each day saying prayers, processing from one altar to another in the monastic compound, and celebrating Mass every day, not just on Sundays and feast days as had long been the custom. Under the modifications introduced by Witiza (who became known as *Benedictus Secundus*, the Second Benedict), the Divine Office, which had previously been an important part of the monastic day, now became its chief occupation. This change dovetailed with the interests of laity, including the landholding aristocracy, the principal benefactors of monasteries, who (as we will see) wanted the prayers of monks to help them achieve salvation. The amount of time spent in prayer left the monks little time to do other kinds of work, and

gradually servants were employed to perform most of the daily labor associated with running the community. Enthusiasm for reform was checked over the course of the ninth century due to political turmoil, civil warfare within the Carolingian family, and the invasions of Magyars, Vikings, and Muslims, but when it resumed, it followed the Benedictine Rule as modified by Benedict the Second.

Within a few hundred years of his death, Benedict (the First) might have had difficulty recognizing—perhaps even approving of—many of the monasteries that followed his Rule: in comparison with the Monte Cassino of the sixth century, these enjoyed the lavish gifts of royal and aristocratic patrons and patronesses, had more extensive monastic grounds and more ornate churches, and larger communities of monks. Further, the communities were not made up of the peasant monks of Benedict's day, but ordained clergy (i.e., monasticism was becoming "clericalized"). In Benedict's Monte Cassino, the monks had "lived together to serve God and to save their souls," and their activities had had "the simplicity of a large family at work."[2] They had helped neighbors and travelers but had had no larger social mission, and while one of their chief occupations was the Divine Office, they did not neglect other types of labor, including agricultural labor. By contrast, at wealthier houses of the tenth century when manual labor was performed it was mostly symbolic: thus, instead of performing real field labor, the abbot would lead the community in a procession accompanied by prayers out to the garden where they would pull a few weeds before processing back. Indeed, even earlier the Anglo-Saxon monk Bede (d. 735), writing in the monastery of Jarrow in northern England, had praised as exceptional the Abbot of Wearmouth, Eosterwine (d. 686) who, though of noble family "took pleasure in undergoing the usual course of monastic discipline in every respect," in particular in threshing, winnowing, milking cows, working in the bakehouse, garden, and kitchen. Even after he had been made abbot he "retained the same spirit," for often "when he went forth on the business of the monastery, if he found the brethren working, he would join them and work with them, by taking the plough-handle, or handling the smith's hammer, or using the winnowing machine, or any thing of like nature."[3]

At Monte Cassino in Benedict's time there had been no emphasis on learning and no extensive book collection (although the tradition of copying manuscripts and collecting books began, as we have seen, with his contemporary Cassiodorus, whose library at Vivarium has been described as the "last really massive collection of books that the ancient world produced");[4] further, the liturgy had been fairly simple, and Mass celebrated only on Sundays and feast days. In comparison, the modifications introduced to the Benedictine regime by "Benedict

the Second" are already seen in an early ninth-century set of regulations written for the northern Frankish monastery of Saint Riquier. Its reform-minded abbot, Angilbert, ordered processions, the non-stop recitation of psalms and prayers, and the celebration of Mass at least thirty times a day, all to be carried out in relays and involving hundreds of monks and novices.

Saint Gall and Cluny provide clear evidence of the passing away of that earlier monastic age and the era of "mixed rules," and a movement toward the relative hegemony of a single (Benedictine) Rule. The monastery of Saint Gall, located near Lake Constance (modern Switzerland), began as a seventh-century cult center founded on the hermitage of an Irish missionary, and was brought into the center of reform activity by Carolingian kings in the ninth century. Cluny, located in southeastern France, was founded by a small group of reform-minded monks and a pious aristocrat in the year 910. In different ways both houses exemplify the emergence of what will be the standard features of Western monasticism for the rest of the Middle Ages (and beyond): the famous Plan of Saint Gall reflects a deliberate organizing of the physical monastery itself, its grounds and its buildings, to create the perfect place for fulfilling Benedict's Rule; and Cluny exemplifies the spirit of monastic reform, which in this period will nearly always mean a desire to observe that Rule in its original vigor (however that was understood). It is on the basis of communities such as these that establishing and supporting monasteries will become great preoccupations of the elite, and of so-called ordinary people (i.e., the majority) in the tenth and eleventh centuries and beyond—as we will see in later chapters.

SAINT GALL

The monastery of Saint Gall was named after Gallus (Saint Gall, d. 646), an Irish missionary and companion of Saint Columbanus, who in the course of their journeys made their way to an area near Lake Constance after hearing that the inhabitants might be receptive to conversion. Saint Gall spoke the common language, so he exhorted the people to give up their false gods (three idols of gilded metal, according to the *Life of St Gall*) and then, demonstrating the courage that missionaries sometimes paid for with their lives, he smashed the idols with stones and threw the pieces into the lake, which Columbanus then blessed. After a few years Columbanus moved on (c. 612) to other ventures in Italy, and Gall stayed behind at a hermitage he had established at a secluded spot on the Steinach River, where the fishing was good (Gall was an avid fisherman). Here he lived the eremitic life, praying and fasting (and fishing), and frequently going out to preach to the resident, mostly still pagan, population.

One of his most famous exploits was driving the demons out of Lake Constance: one night, on the eastern shore of the lake where Gall was laying nets in the water to catch fish, he heard the "demon of the mountain top" calling to its fellow demon in the lake, asking it to help drive the "aliens" (who had thrown him out of his temple) from the land. The lake demon replied that he could not because Gall was protected by prayer. After Gall made the sign of the cross and commanded the demon to leave, the "voice of an unseen being" began wailing from the mountain top as the demon fled. With miracles such as these, Gall's reputation for sanctity grew and his hermitage became a cult center. He later became known as the "Apostle of Switzerland."

After his death a church was built on the site of the original hermit cell, and in the early eighth century the Abbey of Saint Gall was founded there, with the body of the saint buried beneath the altar of Saint Peter in the abbey church. In 747 the head of the community, Abbot Otmar, adopted the Benedictine Rule and arranged the grounds according to the Rule with spaces for common living, but the monastery fell on hard times when a neighbor seized some of its lands. Abbot Gozbert (r. 816–836) rebuilt the abbey's fortunes and wanted to restore the old structures of the monastery, and to do so in the spirit of the current reform movement. About the year 820 he received from Haito, the abbot of nearby Reichenau, a plan for the rebuilding of Saint Gall which historians have long viewed as the "blueprint" of an ideal Benedictine monastery, that is, a plan drawn up to promote monastic planning and reform throughout the Carolingian empire. That famous document survives to this day, as a national treasure of Switzerland, thanks to the monastic library at Saint Gall, where it has been kept for the last 1,200 years.

For its survival we must also thank Wiborada, a holy woman who lived in a cell attached to a nearby church and supported herself working as a bookbinder for the monks. In 926 she prophesied that the monastery would soon be attacked—as it turned out, an accurate forecast. The monks had just enough time before the Magyars arrived to remove the entire contents of the library (and the monastery's wine stores!) for safekeeping to the monastery at Reichenau, some twenty-five miles away. This was no mean feat as the library contained more than 400 volumes, a large collection for that time. Wiborada herself refused to leave, and when the invaders broke into her cell and found her at prayer, they split open her skull with an axe, a death which earned her the title of martyr. For her prayers and sacrifice she was formally canonized by the Catholic Church in 1047—the first woman ever to be recognized as a saint by the official Church. (She is also the patron saint of librarians, and is usually depicted holding a book and an axe.) The monastery of Saint Gall would survive to become a

leading center for the creation of literature, music, and art in the early Middle Ages.

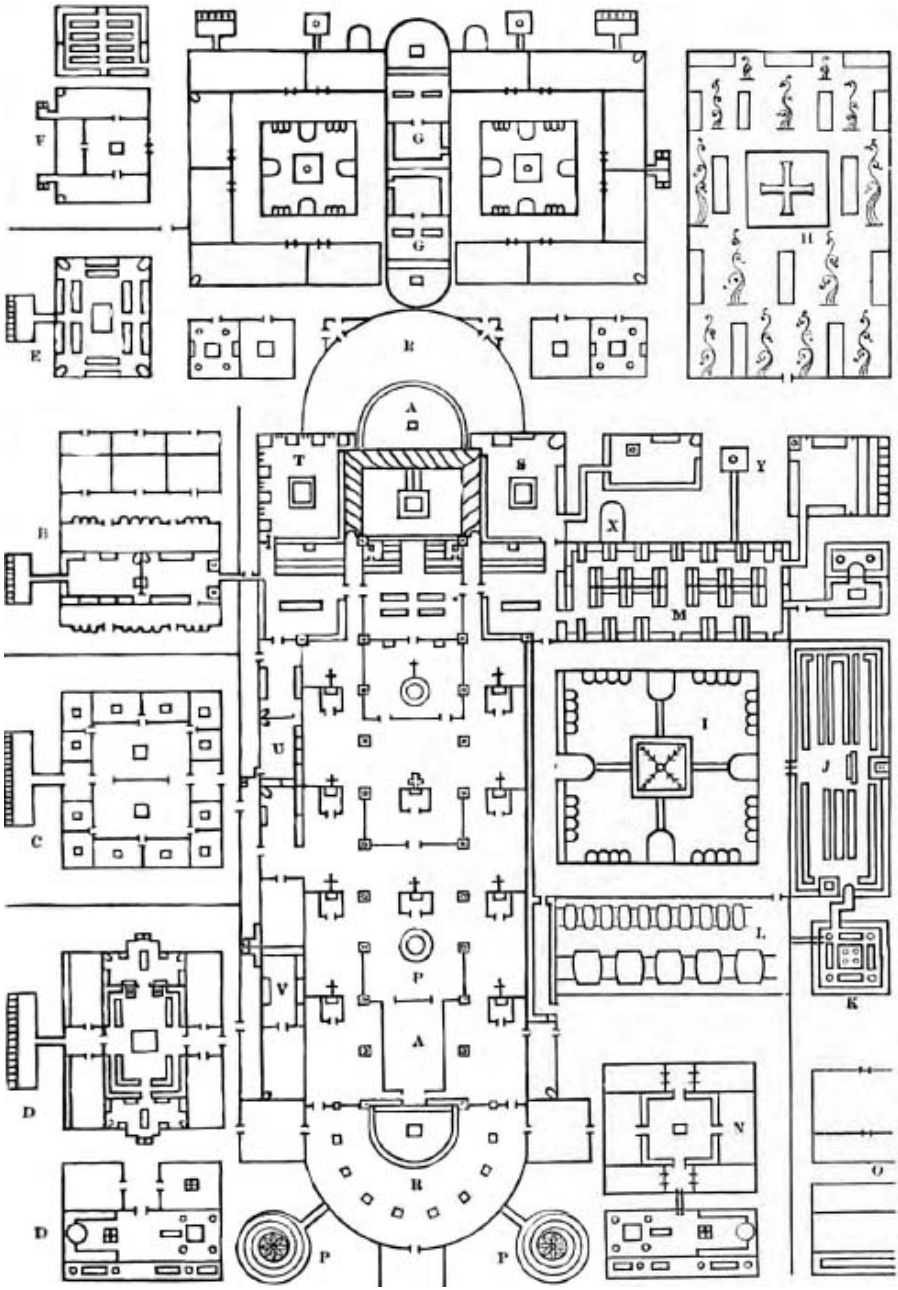
The martyrdom of Wiborada, fifteenth-century manuscript illustration. (Courtesy Abbey Library of Saint Gall)

THE PLAN OF SAINT GALL

The plan of Saint Gall of c. 820, "the impossibly perfect monastery," shows us "the Benedictine schema almost fully realized, [a schema that] was to remain predominant throughout the Middle Ages."[5] Its "core" included the church, cloister, dormitory, refectory, kitchens, and cellars; and outside the core, the abbot's house, the infirmary, lodgings for guests and novices, and various workshops (everything but the chapter house or hall for the daily meetings of the community). It has been described as a utopian plan and a "Noah's Ark of a Monastery," because of its completeness and the "rigorous allocation" of every building according to function.[6] (One is reminded of the layout and order of a nineteenth-century Shaker community in the United States, with its carefully arranged grounds and buildings.)[7]

The Saint Gall plan was not unique—in fact the 1,200-year-old Plan that survives today is a tracing of an original, made soon after the original was drawn. In this age of reform, everywhere monasteries

were being built, rebuilt, or enlarged, so plans were swapped from abbot to abbot.[8] As we have seen, a new king, Louis the Pious, was continuing the program of religious reform begun by his father, Charlemagne (d. 814). In the summers of 816 and 817 Louis held a major church council (with the Second Benedict, Louis's "reform czar," presiding) at his capital at Aachen (modern Aix-la-Chapelle in eastern France) whose aim was to standardize monastic practice. The statutes that were issued and declared mandatory for all monasteries included rulings about monastic dress and diet (e.g., no snacks, fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays), a mandatory reading aloud of a chapter from Benedict's *Rule* or Cassian's *Collations* every day at the meeting of the community (the meeting came to be called the "chapter" and the place where it convened the "chapter house"), and, above all, the increased length of the liturgy and prayer services. The Plan of Saint Gall may have been intended as a basic model for this movement of reform, to reshape the "traditional rhythm of monastic life in conformity" to a single rule. It was drawn in red and black ink on five pieces of parchment sewn together to form a single sheet (about 45 × 31 inches), with names and descriptions of the buildings and other features. Among the forty different structures shown on the Plan is the earliest known actual drawing of a *cloister*, the four-sided, covered walkway at the center of the monastic compound which allowed easy movement between the church, dormitory, refectory, and kitchen, and made it easier for the heads of the community to keep an eye on everyone, as noted earlier.



A line drawing of a section of the Plan of St Gall, with East at the top, showing the church (the long oblong structure at center) and the square cloister to its right. The cloister is bordered by the monks' dormitory, refectory, and cellar to its top, right and bottom, respectively. East of the church (across the top of the Plan shown, from right to left) are the medicinal herb garden, the lodgings and chapels for the sick and for novices, and the cemetery and orchard. The abbot's house and lodgings for guests run along the left side of the church (i.e., north of the church). (Fergusson, James. *History of Architecture in All Countries from the Earliest Times*, 1874)

That the Plan depicted an ideal monastery, and was not really a "blueprint" to be used to build one, is revealed by the dedication written on it by the sender, Abbot Haito: "I have sent you, Gozbert my dearest son, this modest example of the disposition of a monastery, that you may dwell upon it in spirit." These words indicate that it was a text to meditate upon, in the monastic tradition of close study and reflection upon a text, and not a plan to use in actual building. As a "generic solution for the ideal monastery," the Plan should be considered as a "two-dimensional meditation on the ideal early medieval monastic community."[9] Just as one can trace with one's eyes the path through a labyrinth as a devotional aid,[10] so one could ruminate upon the Plan of Saint Gall and trace a path in the church or from structure to structure throughout the monastic grounds, imagining the life there.

The prayer labyrinth on the floor of Chartres Cathedral, thirteenth century. (Sylvain Sonnet/Corbis)

The ideal monastery shown on the Plan is one that is in tune with the harmonies of the universe: everywhere there is a reliance upon numbers sacred to Christianity, especially forty (e.g., the width of the nave is forty feet, as is the width of the transept, there are forty structures in all, etc.). The East (facing Jerusalem) is at the top of the Plan, in contrast to today's convention, which places North at the top of maps. The great church, that "point of contact between heaven and earth"[11] where the liturgy is performed and the Divine Office is sung, dominates the Plan. To the south of the church lie the cloister and residence of the monks, a sort of "monastery within the monastery,"[12]

flanked by everything necessary to their daily life: dormitory, refectory, cellar and kitchen (the very placement of the beds, tables, benches, and storage barrels all carefully delineated on the Plan), and latrine and bath house. The cloister's proximity to the church facilitated the brothers' prompt attendance in the choir for the Divine Service. Equally handy was a structure, attached to the church on the northeast, which housed the *scriptorium* on the first floor and the library above.

East of the church, and farthest from the gate in the west, were the health and medical facilities: these included a house for the physicians, the infirmary, a special house for bleeding, as well as lodgings and separate chapels for novices and the sick. North of the church were located the lodgings and facilities for distinguished guests, and in the west, lodgings for vassals, knights, and servants of the Emperor. Also to the west and near the principal gate were shelters for sheep, goats, cows, swine, brood mares and their foals, and the keepers of these animals, so that when they needed to go outside the monastery to the fields they could do so without disturbing the community. In short, everything had its proper place in an ensemble of compact and rational order. The monastery of the plan would house about 270 people, 110 of them monks.

Everything is here in this truly self-sufficient community: housing for important guests, visiting monks, pilgrims, and poor visitors, with their own bake- and brew-houses; a separate church for the novices and sick monks to share, each with its own altar and cloister; and a house for physicians, and next to it a special house set aside for bleeding, one of the oldest and most widely practiced medical procedures in the world, based on the theory that removing small amounts of blood helped maintain a balance of bodily fluids (it was practiced in the West into the twentieth century). There are residences for artisans, workhouses, a mill, and granaries; a cemetery, orchard, fruit and vegetable garden, medicinal garden, with the types of herbs specified (lily, rose, climbing ban, pepperwort, costmary, Greek hay, rosemary, mint, sage, rue, iris, pennyroyal, water cress, cumin, lovage, fennel), and even exactly where they should be planted, a henhouse and goose house (and houses for the gardener and the keeper of fowls), and latrines. Each building is situated with a view to practical needs and organization: the brethren could live, work, and worship mostly separated from visitors, the sick, novices, and workers; the abbot had his own house (in opposition to Benedict the Second's ruling that the abbot live the common life alongside the brethren) which allowed easy access to the church and the heart of the monastery, but it also had sitting rooms and a dining room where he could entertain important visitors from outside. (One recalls the

"monastic villages" of Pachomius in Egypt, discussed in the Introduction, where bakers, carpenters, and other craftsmen were housed in their own separate residences.)

One of Saint Gall's best-known inhabitants was Notker the Stammerer (meaning that he had a stutter) who lived from c. 840 to 912, almost entirely within the walls of Saint Gall. He was sent there to be educated as a child by his parents because of health problems that made him unfit for a warrior's life, although a contemporary biographer tells us that in spite of being physically delicate he was strong in mind and spirit. At Saint Gall he was the master of guests, teacher, librarian, poet, and musician (in fact, he is sometimes credited with being the first German musical composer). Among his musical compositions, Notker wrote a *Book of Hymns*, a collection of sequences to be sung during divine service. (A modern speech therapist who has studied Notker's music believes that the chanting sequences he devised to be sung during worship, specifically the drawing out of syllables, were a form of speech therapy: prolonging the last "a" in the word *Alleluia* (aaaaa) bears a striking resemblance to techniques that are used today to treat stuttering. Notker is today the patron saint of children who stutter.)[13]

Saint Gall enjoys another distinction, in addition to the stunning Plan, that signals the spirit of reform: before his death in 814, Charlemagne, who promoted the Rule and ordered that all monasteries follow it, also wanted good, accurate copies of Benedict's *Rule* to be available in all monasteries, especially the largest and most important houses. To that end, he had an exact copy made of the *Rule* from the copy that was held at Monte Cassino itself, and from this transcription exact duplicates were made and sent to every major monastery in the Frankish kingdom. Only the copy that was sent to Saint Gall has survived, and is thus believed to be the only surviving text of a work of late Antiquity that is just one remove from its original.

Many years later, around the year 1200, an unknown monk of the monastery used the blank backside of the parchment Plan to write a life of Saint Martin. Thankfully he did not cut it up—doubtless he understood that it was an important document—and in a most fortunate case of recycle and reuse, simply folded it into a fourteen-page book and wrote his life of Martin on the blank pages. (A demonstration of how it was folded can be seen online.)[14] Two-and-a-half centuries later, in 1461, the unknown monk who drew up a catalog of Saint Gall's book collection examined the Plan and concluded that it was an illustration of Saint Martin's monastery, accompanying the *Life of St Martin*.

CLUNY

Twelve years before the Magyar attack and Wiborada's martyrdom at Saint Gall, a monastery was established some 300 miles to the southwest, in the duchy of Burgundy in central France, which would become a major influence on Western monasticism for centuries to come. In difficult times, Cluny was able to begin and carry out a successful reform, establish hundreds of "daughter houses" and inspire many imitators, showing yet again the power of the monastery to survive and even thrive in an age of invasion. Luckily, Cluny has also left for us a rich body of evidence: the foundation charter which expresses the intent of the founder, biographies of some of Cluny's first abbots, and above all a description of daily practices at Cluny compiled around the year 1075 by Ulrich, a Cluniac monk who was asked by the abbot of Hirsau, in Germany, to describe the daily life and customs of Cluny. This source provides us with an inside view of life at Cluny at the height of its influence.

FOUNDATION AND EARLY BENEFACTORS

The new monastery was located near (and thus was named after) the small town of Cluny on lands belonging to Duke William of Aquitaine, who wished to found a new monastery. He was elderly, had no immediate heir as his only son had died, and was troubled in his mind for a murder he had committed in a fit of rage—many monasteries owed their foundation and ongoing support to the blood-stained consciences of the landholding elite. William sought the expert advice of a man named Berno, the abbot of Baume, a strict monastery in the Alps (and one of the few houses that maintained observance of the Rule following Benedict the Second's reforms). The two men set off together on a tour of the Duke's grounds to find a good spot for the new foundation. According to tradition, the Duke hesitated when Berno chose the fertile and well-wooded valley of Cluny because this area included some of his favorite hunting ground. Berno is said to have replied, "O Duke, on the Day of Judgment, what will serve you better, the prayers of monks or the baying of hunting dogs?" (The Duke's reply to this argument may be imagined.) William's gifts to the new foundation included the town of Cluny itself, thus the monastery became not just the neighbor but the lord of the town. In general, relations between Cluny and its town seem to have been cordial, which was not always the case between townspeople and their monastic lord. Another important early gift came from the King of the Franks himself, Rudolf of Burgundy, who in 927 granted Cluny the right to mint its own currency, which it did for the next 300 years.[15]

The charter that was drawn up to record the grant of land has

survived. It preserves for us the interesting spectacle of Duke William, a powerful (and hot-headed) warrior and prince avowing before all his weakness, his inability to "despise" worldly things and lead the monastic life. The language may be conventional (it is found in other charters of the period), but that does not mean it is insincere:

> I, William and my wife Ingelberga … desiring to provide for my own salvation while I am still able, have considered it advisable—nay, most necessary, that from the temporal goods which have been conferred upon me I should give some little portion for the gain of my soul … and making the act not a temporary but a lasting one, I should support at my own expense a congregation of monks. And this is my trust, this my hope, indeed that although I myself am unable to despise all things, nevertheless, by receiving despisers of the world, whom I believe to be righteous, I may receive the reward of the righteous.[16]

The Duke's fervent wish for the prayers of "the righteous" would have made sense to most medieval people, rich and poor alike. Lay enthusiasm for monastic prayer stemmed largely from the belief that those who lead an arduous life in God's name can pray for and benefit those still living "in the world" (this idea, discussed more fully below, is found in other belief systems, including historic Buddhism).[17] William refers to the monastery that is to be built as a "house of prayer" which should be "faithfully filled with vows and supplications," and where "there shall be diligently directed to God prayers, beseeching and exhortations both for me and for all." By "all" he means (as he specifies) his lord King Odo, his father and mother, himself and his wife, his sister Ava who left him that land when she herself entered a nunnery, his brothers and sisters and nephews and all relatives of both sexes; and ultimately "since all of us Christians are held together by one bond of love and faith, let this donation be for all—for the orthodox, namely, of past, present or future times." The traditional role of monasteries as charitable institutions is also enshrined in the charter:

> We will, further, that in our times and in those of our successors, according as the opportunities and possibilities of that place shall allow, there shall daily, with the greatest zeal be performed there works of mercy towards the poor, the needy, strangers, and pilgrims.

Cluny apparently honored this obligation to the full: thus, during a period of severe famine in the years around 1033 it reportedly used up all its grain stores and sold church plate and other treasures in order

to buy grain for itself and the poor of the region.

Other powerful benefactors express similar ideas and hopes. In 951 Cluny received a gift of land from a woman named Doda and her son Letbald who, according to the language of their charter, "think it necessary that we share some of the things that were conferred on us, Christ granting, for the benefit of our souls. We do this to make Christ's poor [i.e. the monks] our friends … so that He may receive us, in the end, in the eternal tabernacle." Letbald gave more than land and money; he also gave himself: "I, the aforesaid Letbald, uncinch the belt of war, cut off the hair of my head and beard for divine love, and with the help of God prepare to receive the monastic habit" at Cluny.

A royal charter of 939 confirms the rights and properties which the monastery had received to that date, and declares all of its lands and the people who work those lands to be inviolable. We see this principle at work a few years later, in 944, when a knight who had killed one of Cluny's peasants gave himself to the monastery in the dead man's stead, as laid out in a charter where he declares that the abbey and its monks now "have the power to do what they will with me."[18] Even if a wealthy benefactor did not enter the monastery as a monk he might still interest himself in the minutiae of its daily life: the duke who founded a new Cluniac monastery (Monstierneuf) in the city of Poitiers in the late eleventh century used to make his way down to the kitchen whenever he visited to talk to the cellarer and make sure the monks had good food to eat—and buy them better food if they did not. (In grateful acknowledgment of his interest the monks set a place for him every day at the table as if he were always present and one of them.) This devoted benefactor also granted the house the right to operate a market on its lands, and to build shops and house merchants there, in order to make it easier for the monks to procure daily necessities, and to provide them with an income-producing benefit, in the form of sales taxes and rents for anyone using the market.[19]

Reconstruction of Cluny Abbey. (Archives Larousse, Paris, France/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library)

When Abbot Hugh began work on a great new church for Cluny in 1088, a church that would take twenty years to build (and that was the largest enclosed space on earth in the twelfth century, a distinction held in the twenty-first century by the Pentagon in Washington D.C.), people from all walks of life contributed what they could, including the very poor; but the greatest donors included people like King Alfonso VI of Castile who endowed Cluny with an annual tribute of 2,000 gold pieces. Some of that money was earmarked to honor the king by extending charity to the needy: feeding 100 poor men every year at Easter, washing the feet of thirty poor men and feeding them on the Thursday of Easter week, and on the anniversary of his death each year the bells were rung for him at Vespers and Mass and twelve poor men were fed for a week (and the monks each received an extra cup of wine).[20]

Thus, active charity was built into Cluny's calendar and daily life: every day twelve three-pound loaves of bread were given to the poor people of the town of Cluny who came to the door of the almonry (a room attached to the kitchen and storehouse in the monastic compound) to receive alms or charitable offerings. Once a week the almoner himself went through the town to take food to the bedridden sick and poor. As he came into a house the women would leave by another door so that the monk would not break the Rule by entering a house where women were; thus, the monastic regime in a sense

percolated out of the monastery itself and into the town and among its people. The almoner would ask the poor to go out to the marshes and gather rushes for the floor of the church and cloister for the great feasts, in return for bread, by which method he fostered their self-respect.[21] Also, on the feast of Saint Maiol (r. 954–994), the monks would take the relics from the church in the monastery to Saint Maiol's church in the town, place them in a special portable shrine and carry them back to the cloister gate, amid the ringing of the abbey bells, where the people of the town waited to join the procession.

CLUNY'S LANDS

The majority of benefactors were not wealthy: much of Cluny's landed wealth came from thousands of small gifts from people of modest means: in the first seventy years of its existence (910–980) the monastery received about 630 separate gifts of land, and most of these were small parcels which were often interspersed with other people's holdings (so on occasion the monastery exchanged pieces of land or bought others in order to create more integrated holdings). Similarly, in the three-year period between 1027 and 1030 some thirty-one gifts of land were made in various forms, as uncultivated land, isolated fields, meadow land, vineyards, forest land, fishing rights, whole villages, and so forth, and for a variety of motives: for example, one donor gave land to atone for abuse of a servant (similar to the example from 944 above), one gift came with an oblate (a child offered by his parents to the monastery to be raised as a monk), one accompanied a man who entered Cluny as a monk, one from a man who wished to die and be buried at Cluny, one because of a murder, and the like.[22] If the land were not cleared the monastery would sometimes lease it out to a peasant, who would clear it and make it into productive land, after which Cluny would divide the tenement with him.

Cluny's lands were the core of its wealth and security in a number of ways. Its vast holdings were organized into a system known as the "food farm," a system of great antiquity and found at monastic houses all over Europe in this period, primarily because of the scattered nature of their landed holdings. By this system the lands belonging to the monastery were organized into separate farms or granges which provided necessities to the community on a rotating basis (if benefactors gave an existing manor or village these could be easily integrated into this economic arrangement). For example, the farmlands at Cluny itself provided bread, beans, and fat for the month of October and the first half of November; then the farm at Péronne (about five miles northeast of Cluny) provided the same for the second half of November, Escussoles for the first half of December, Chevignes

from mid-December to the end of January, and so on throughout the year. The length of time varied from grange to grange depending on its size and productivity, and account was also taken of soil quality: farms best suited to growing grapes provided wine, those situated on lands good for oat production would supply oats (which was food for horses, not people). Some twenty granges, most of them located within a distance of twenty-five to thirty miles from Cluny provided most of its food; farms that were too far away to send produce would send money payments instead. Each grange was headed by an official who answered to the Grand Prior of Cluny, and was equipped with a refectory, dormitory, chapel, cloister, and guest room. The handful of monks who lived there, along with the lay brothers who did most of the work, also said the hours of the Divine Service, just as Saint Benedict had ruled for monks outside the regular community. (We will get a closer look at life in the granges and their relationship to the mother-house in Chapter Four.)

THE POWER OF PRAYER

The picture drawn thus far of Cluny's foundation reveals many "organic" ties with the world outside: what went on inside the monastery was affected by what went on outside of it. Such connections and dependence are given vital form by the desire of most donors, rich and poor, for a spiritual benefit in exchange for their gift, such as being remembered in the prayers of the monks, special services on the anniversary of the death of a relative, or commemoration by the lighting of a lamp or candle on one of the church's altars. Monasteries kept track of benefactors, their gifts, and the religious services they were owed in a special volume, the *Liber Vitae* or *Book of Life*, to which new names could be added over time. Obviously these could be huge compilations: the *Liber Vitae* for the Cluniac nunnery of Marcigny had about 10,000 names by the year 1100. Cluny's *Book of Life* was begun in the time of Abbot Odo (r. 926–944), and that same book was used throughout the Middle Ages and beyond to record the names of benefactors and their gifts. When it was lost in the 1600s, this book was 700 years old: another example of the monasteries' unrivaled lead as the makers and keepers of records in the medieval period.

Medieval monasteries are often described by historians as islands of peace where prayers were offered up to God day and night for protection from violence and for forgiveness for the sins of humanity. While many people in the modern world may not think of prayer as an effective response to trouble, this was not the view of medieval monks, nuns, and the general population. People believed that the good deeds and prayers of one person, especially a person of

exemplary life, could benefit others; indeed the sufferings and merits of Jesus, his mother, and all the saints created a "treasury of merit" that would never run dry and that could be tapped to repair the damage done by sin and to gain God's mercy. This belief is found in other world religions, notably Buddhism, where the laity believed that "the self-denial of the Buddha and his disciples created a reservoir of power that could be tapped by prayer and by the recitation and hearing of the Buddha's words.… Monks were a 'field of merit' from which society could harvest blessings."[23]

Medieval people's belief in a "treasury of merit" led them to support monasticism in general and Cluny in particular, one of the greatest of those "fortresses of prayer," because at Cluny prayer, liturgy and the Divine Office crowded out the other traditional Benedictine forms of labor, especially manual labor. Although monks traditionally held to a rule of silence, Cluny's emphasis on prayer led it to enforce that rule with particular rigor. Essentially, with a few exceptions, silence was to be observed at all times: wherever he went and whatever he was doing the monk was (silently) to pray constantly and recite the psalms. The silence in the monastery, explained a monastic author, "signified the eternal silence," that is, the silence after death.[24] Obedience to a strict rule of silence may strike us as oppressive, but it might have been welcome to people who spent many of their waking hours singing, chanting, and praying aloud!

TALES OF THE ERA OF REFORM

A monk named John of Salerno wrote the life of Odo, the great reformer who became the second abbot of Cluny (r. 926–944). John's biography begins the story of Odo's life before he came to Cluny, when he was the master of novices (i.e., head of the monastic school) at Baume, in eastern France. John of Salerno's account reveals precious details of the minutiae of daily life in a monastery that, like Cluny, was a center of reform activity in the tenth century: thus, at Baume, at the end of a meal, each monk was to collect his breadcrumbs on the table and eat them before the reading was finished. This humble ritual had assumed great significance at Baume because of a miracle that had occurred earlier: when a certain brother, of excellent life and much beloved by everyone in the community, was dying, he cried out to the others who had come to pray at his side that the devil was accusing him before God of not having observed this very custom. In evidence, the devil produced a sack full of breadcrumbs which the monk had refused to eat and which had fallen from the table. The brother was able to make the sign of the cross and to pray as he died, and thus was saved; and "from that day" John writes, "the breadcrumbs were collected with all diligence."[25]

Once he was abbot of Cluny, Odo was asked to travel to other houses to help them reform. He was not always welcomed with open arms. Around the year 930 he was put in charge of Fleury-on-the-Loire (the monastery where Saint Benedict had been buried since the mid-600s) by a powerful local lord named Elisiard who was worried about reports he had heard of the community's evil ways. In fact the brethren had only recently been reunited, after being scattered "far and wide" for fear of Norse warriors, and these traumatic events had taken their toll on the quality of life in the monastery: the brothers had divided up the goods of the house rather than holding them in common, were eating meat, and quarreled constantly among themselves. (So bad was the state of affairs that Saint Benedict himself had appeared to one of the monks and told him to go and tell the others that they were giving him "no rest" and that he was leaving. The monk delivered this message to the brethren who, instead of praying for the saint's return, rode off on horseback to bring him back by force, and when they could not find him, they "began ceaselessly to mock" the brother to whom Benedict had appeared.)

Odo set out to rectify this situation. Expecting trouble, Elisiard had enlisted two other counts with their followers and two bishops to accompany himself and Odo to Fleury, and as the group approached some of the brothers got swords, went up on the cloister roof, and threw stones down at them, while others armed themselves and barred the door "saying they would die before they allowed these men to come in, or would receive an abbot of another community." They chose a young, good-natured monk named Wulfaldus to act as an intermediary, and sent him out with royal charters that stated no one from another community should ever be head of theirs. After three days of this, Odo secretly mounted a donkey and set out for the monastery all alone (another version of the story has him placing a ladder against a corner wall and climbing into the monastic compound). His companions raced after him, calling out "Where are you going, Father? Do you seek your death? Don't you see that they are prepared to kill you?" But Odo knew what he was doing: as he approached on his humble mount, the monks threw down their weapons, went out to meet him, and embraced his feet. "The community received Odo as a father, and his escort returned home."[26] Lord Elisiard, like Letbald mentioned earlier, later renounced the world and took the monastic habit.

DAILY LIFE AT CLUNY

The view of life at Cluny that can be pieced together from its rich stores of evidence reveals a daily regimen whose every action was surrounded by a multitude of elaborate rituals (like collecting

breadcrumbs). For example, on Sundays after Mass the Abbot would go with the children of the monastery to the guesthouse to wash the feet of poor travelers, each one giving two pennies apiece to the person whose feet they washed. At the beginning of the harvest season, in late summer, the first ripened grapes and beans, along with new bread and wine, were presented during Mass, and were blessed and eaten afterward. The ceremony that attended the reception of a child oblate involved a ritual that emphasized the sense of an offering. The parents accompanied their son, who held a chalice and paten (the drinking cup and dish used to hold the wine and bread of the eucharist) in his hand wrapped in an altar cloth, and presented him to the abbot (like an offering at Mass) who put a cowl on him and blessed him. The boy would be admitted as a novice at the age of fifteen, when he would declare his desire to be received by the community, after which his head was shaved and he put on the habit of the novice.

Manuscript illustration of a child being given to a monastery by his parents,

thirteenth century. (Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis)

Novices had to learn a multitude of daily rituals (even Ulrich says he cannot remember how many things they had to learn!) such as how and when to bow, when to sit or stand, how to chant, how to dress and undress, and how to ask pardon for one's faults. When the novices were received as full members of the community, again an elaborate ceremony was involved: they must come before the altar during Mass, prostrate themselves upon the ground, pray, and were then raised up by the Abbot who blessed their cowls, put them on, and kissed them. For the next three days they wore the cowls day and night, in complete silence, and were followed everywhere by a "guardian" to make sure they followed all the rules. Indeed officials called *circatores* (one historian calls them "wandering spies")[27] would make the rounds of the abbey at different times to check that all was in order, reminding us that a very dense system of supervision permeated monastic life, and that in spite of the fact that monks were "solitaries" who had left the world behind, they lived very much in the public eye. Such a lack of privacy, however, was normal for all medieval people who lived more or less in "continuous company."[28]

Added to all the rules and rituals that every monk had to master was the system of sign language that necessarily developed in response to the strict Rule of Silence: from Monday to Friday talking was only permitted for half an hour in the morning after the meeting in the chapter house and again, for even less time, after Sext. During those brief periods when the brothers could talk they performed certain essential tasks such as washing clothes or utensils. Silence was also kept all day on Sundays, on holy days, and throughout Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. At the table, then, when one of the brothers wanted the bread passed to him, he would make a circle with thumbs and index fingers (since bread was usually baked in a round loaf); for a dish, he would hold out the hand flat; for an egg, knock one finger on another in imitation of breaking an eggshell; for pancake, ruffle the hair. Dozens of other signs existed for condiments, utensils, clothing, combs, needles, the church services, for speaking, hearing, knowing, good and bad, and so forth.

As monks-in-training, novices were included in much of the daily round but not as full-fledged participants. They could only leave the cloister for processions, and although they attended the hours of daily prayer, they were only required to recite some portions of the service aloud. Instead of attending chapter meetings, they were to sit in the kitchen and watch in silence while food was being cooked (no sampling allowed of course), an interesting custom that evidently sought to use the adolescent interest in food to inculcate habits of self-control.

As we saw was the case at Monte Cassino in Benedict's day, the person who enters a monastery relinquishes his or her "civilian" dress and is provided with a new "uniform." At Cluny the monk was given a pair of drawers, socks, a pair of day shoes, a long robe and leather belt, and over this a long scapular with the cowl or hood attached, and above that a short cape. These clothes were made by tailors who were employed by the monastery and worked in the abbey workshop or in the town. When a monk received any new garments he inked his name on them and gave them to one of the tailors to stitch it over in thread. Any clothes that needed to be mended were collected in a box in the chapter house, just as dirty clothes were put in a hamper in the cloister where the launderers picked them up and brought them back clean the following week.

Each monk had a writing tablet and stylus, a wooden comb, a small kit of needles and thread, and a knife to cut his food (these were the knives that Saint Benedict had specified had to be taken off at night). Monks shaved once a week, sitting in a row along the cloister wall and passing along the common razors and bowls to each other as they finished (for the Cluniac tonsure or special haircut the top of the head was shaved and a ring of hair was left around the head above the ears). Personal grooming also entailed bathing several times a year (not including sink baths), especially at the great feasts of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, and bleeding was also done periodically and by request. The monks slept on mattresses stuffed with straw (changed twice yearly) and a hard pillow, blanket, and coverlet. (No matter how hot it might be, they slept fully clothed and could never have more than their feet and arms uncovered. Nor could a monk enter the lavatory with his hood up since that would make it difficult to identify him. In such provisions again we see concern for the prevention of "special friendships" between the monks.) When the brothers arose for the night office they were to make their beds before proceeding to the church. One monk was chosen to make the rounds with a lantern and make sure no one fell asleep during the night office. If someone was asleep the monk was not to speak to him or shake him but rather pass the lantern back and forth before his face until he woke up.

We have seen that the basic framework of the day was the Divine Service, and over the years the amount of time devoted to it increased, as the number of saints' days increased, more psalms and hymns were added, and the liturgy continued to be enriched and lengthened: on a great feast day the monks might spend as much as eight hours praying, singing, and reading in the choir (far more than what was outlined by Saint Benedict), to the point that Abbot Peter (r. 1122–1157) himself wrote a new (and shorter) hymn to replace the old one sung on the feast of Saint Benedict "on account of the boredom of the

singers."[29] Mass was celebrated twice a day, after Prime and Tierce, and there were additional Masses said in the side chapels for patrons and benefactors at different times during the day.

Also built into the daily schedule was the chapter meeting. After morning Mass the whole community processed from the church to the chapter house (the monastery's "business center"),[30] where the abbot seated himself on a throne with rows of seats ranged around him for the monks. The meeting began with a prayer, a reading of a chapter of the Benedictine Rule, sometimes a special sermon if it were a major feast day, and then the chapter got down to business: receiving new novices, meting out discipline, discussion of financial or business matters, perhaps revision of the rules, and the like. The monks were free to express their opinions so long as they did so in a respectful manner, and the abbot had to listen to what they had to say, although he was not bound to follow their advice—all final decisions rested entirely with him. A monk accused of a fault would ask pardon, perhaps receive a stroke for punishment, with severer penalties for graver sins. (If he committed a sin in the presence of laymen he was publicly punished with a beating at the entrance of the church, and had to stand barefoot and bareheaded at the door of the church on Sunday when the townspeople came, with someone at his side to answer any questions about his wrongdoing—another interesting intersection between the monastery and the people of the town of Cluny.) The chapter meeting ended around 10:00 A.M. and then there was a free period for study, administrative work for those assigned to it, and the like until the hour of Sext, at midday.

We have already discussed the kinds of officials that Saint Benedict thought necessary to assist the abbot in daily administration of the monastery. Cluny similarly had its chamberlain, cellarer (with four officers under him, namely, the keeper of the granary, of the wine, the gardener, and keeper of the fish ponds), and the like, all charged with supervision, making sure they had adequate supplies, and other duties. Thus, the keeper of the guesthouse had to receive guests and their horses and servants, be sure all were provided with food and drink (and candles if they arrived at night). He also received all letters that came to the abbey, which he then delivered to the Abbot, and he kept the obituary roll and the key of the cloister door which he closed at night and opened each morning.[31] The sacristan, charged with care of the church fabric, also cared for the relics and had other special duties, such as making the communion wafers for the sacrament on the great festival days: the best wheat was chosen (grain by grain), carried to the mill in a special linen bag where it was ground on millstones that had been carefully washed, and the flour was kneaded on a special table while the brothers sang psalms. Again, the detail of

such arrangements impresses us with the ritualized nature of every daily activity, which heightened the importance of whatever task was being performed and (at least ideally) fostered the internalization of the rules and spirit of the monastic way of life.

THE LIBRARY AT CLUNY

Portions of each day were spent in reading and private meditation, and Cluny, like every monastery, had facilities for both. Its library existed from earliest times and was housed in a room called the *armarium* (Latin: cupboard, chest, bookcase), attached to the cloister and adjacent to the *scriptorium* or writing office. The first librarian (*armarius*) was appointed before the middle of the tenth century, none other than Maiol himself who later became abbot (954–994). By the time of Abbot Peter (1122–1157), Cluny had the largest library in France, a distinction it also held in the sixteenth century (a scholarly visitor to Cluny around the year 1700 was shown a 500-year-old catalog of the library's holdings, which listed some 1,800 volumes, many of these of course containing more than one work).[32] According to rules drawn up for the library in the eleventh century, the *armarius* (who ranked next to the abbot in importance) was to care for all the books of the monastery and to oversee all copying of manuscripts, an occupation so important that scribes were excused from some part of their religious duties. The rules also required that there be an annual audit of the books.[33] The sorts of books one would expect to find in a monastic library were all there: copies of Scripture, commentaries on Scripture, saints' lives, works of the Fathers like Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, and later authors like the historian Bede (d. 732) and Anselm of Bec (d. 1109), a theologian. There were copies of monastic rules, collections of the canons (rulings) of church councils, papal decrees, manuals of Roman and ecclesiastical law, treatises on medicine, music and science, histories both ancient and more recent, classical historians like Livy and Josephus, as well as poetry, philosophy, and even Aesop's fables. History was well represented, because medieval intellectuals believed that study of the past enabled one to see God working in the world, and so were the standard pagan classical authors, although as always there were some mixed feelings about this. Indeed, some of the monks enjoyed reading Virgil so much that they had guilty dreams: one night Abbot Hugh (1049–1109) himself dreamed that a pile of serpents were coiled beneath his head —and he awoke and remembered he had left a copy of Virgil under his pillow![34] The sign language to be used to request the book of a pagan author from the *armarius* was to scratch one's ear like a dog, signaling that it was less worthy than a Christian text—but the books were there in Cluny's library, century after century, all the same![35]

We have seen that reading was built into the fabric of daily life at Cluny: a chapter of Benedict's *Rule* was read in the chapter meeting each day, there was reading during meals, and monks were expected to study and read in private as well. Books were handed out for private reading at the beginning of Lent: the books were laid out on a carpet spread on the floor of the chapter house and a list of all the books that were given out the year before, and to whom, was read aloud. Each monk handed his book back and received another, and if he had not finished reading it he had to ask pardon for his fault. Two lists have survived of the books loaned to monks at the beginning of Lent for the years 1042 and 1252; the latter list includes, among others, a herbal, a book of prognostications, a history of the kings of Britain and Jerusalem, a book on animals, a book of verse, and a book in Hebrew—and also a list of eleven books that are missing! Books were leant to other Cluniac houses (there were 128 out on loan in 1252), and even to houses outside the order but the borrower had to provide sufficient surety. Books also got damaged in usual and not-so-usual ways: a letter from Abbot Peter to the prior of another Cluniac house asks for the loan of a volume of the letters of Saint Augustine because Cluny's copy, which had been at one of the granges, had been eaten by a bear!

Copying manuscripts at Cluny was done in the scriptorium, probably located next to the library in the northern end of the cloister, and perhaps supported in part by special revenues that were set aside for that purpose, such as the tithes from a particular church, or the income from a mill.[36] Not all but many of the brothers would have participated in the work of copying books, and there were different levels of scribal expertise, from those who did the basic copying of the house, to calligraphers, correctors, and illuminators, all highly valued skills (we get a sense of their importance from early medieval Irish law codes where the penalty for murdering a scribe is as high as that for a bishop or abbot).[37] Scribes could not refuse an assignment and would be punished if they did: a thirteenth-century monastic statute decrees that the monk who is unwilling to copy gets no wine. At Cluny the scribes were allowed to go into the kitchen to make their ink (usually made from charcoal soot or charred animal bone mixed with tree gum and water) and to dry the writing on their parchment sheets by the fire. Along with copying books on loan or replacing ones that were damaged or lost (or eaten by bears), the scribes of Cluny also produced all the books needed for religious services at Cluny,[38] so there was always plenty of routine copying to do.

In manuscripts from all over Europe there survive descriptions of the backbreaking work entailed in copying manuscripts, along with comments in the margin from weary scribes, reminding us that this

was a form of labor like any other: “Now I’ve written the whole thing: for Christ’s sake give me a drink.” “Thank God it will soon be dark” (scribes preferred to work in natural light, not candlelight which was hard on the eyes). “Thin ink, bad vellum, difficult text.” “Well, I call this vellum thin.” “As the sick man desires health, so does the scribe desire the end of the volume.” A parting observation often found at the end of manuscripts was “Three fingers hold the pen, but the whole body toils.” The magnificent library at Cluny, like those found in the tens of thousands of monasteries across Europe, was the product of centuries of unflagging labor and vigilant protection by many thousands of nameless monks and nuns.

CLUNY’S END

Cluny, the “greatest creation of the Middle Ages”[39] in the eyes of some, is no longer with us. It did not survive the age of “Enlightenment” and the French Revolution. The last Mass celebrated at Cluny took place in October of 1791, the monks were dispersed, and the Order came to an end. That same year its bells were melted down to make cannon and the church was sacked: tombs were defaced, vestments destroyed, books and manuscripts burnt. The entire abbey was attacked by a force of 200 men in 1793, and piecemeal destruction continued for the next fifteen years. One of the monks forced to leave in 1791 was still alive in 1837.[40]

NOTES

1. Peter King, *Western Monasticism: A History of the Monastic Movement in the Latin Church* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1999), pp. 76–7; and C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages.* 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, Inc., 2001), p. 43.

2. David Knowles, *Christian Monasticism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), pp. 35–6.

3. Bede, “Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” in *The Age of Bede*, trans. J.F. Webb, ed. D.H. Farmer (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 194–5.

4. Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2003), p. 53.

5. Wolfgang Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe: The Architecture of Orders* (Princeton: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 27.

6. Braunfels, *Monasteries*, pp. 42–3.

7. An image of a Plan for the Shaker Community of Canterbury, New Hampshire, drawn by a Shaker Elder in 1848, may be seen at http://www.rcmarchitect.net/shaker-history-consulting.html. The layout, grounds, and buildings of the Canterbury Shaker village community as it existed at its height in the middle of the nineteenth century are reminiscent of the self-sufficient, agricultural orientation of a medieval monastery: the more than 100 structures at the Canterbury village (which comprised some 3,000 acres) included a meetinghouse for religious services, dwelling houses, workshops, farm buildings, an infirmary, laundry building, and schoolhouse; the community’s economy was based on agriculture, orchards, dairy, light manufactures

(clothespins, wooden pails), and crafts which included woodworking, weaving, maple sugaring, beekeeping, fancywork, production of patent medicines, and a seed-packaging business. See David Starbuck, *Neither Plain Nor Simple: New Perspectives on the Canterbury Shakers* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2004), pp. 17–20.

8. Braunfels, *Monasteries*, p. 44.

9. http://www.stgallplan.org/en/index_plan.html, accessed at the University of Connecticut on March 16, 2012. This is an excellent website devoted to the Plan.

10. There are numerous websites dedicated to the study and use of Christian and other labyrinths. See, for example, http://www.labyrinthos.net/photo_library14.html.

11. Georges Duby, *History of Private Life*, vol II: *Revelations of the Medieval World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 40.

12. Lorna Price, *The Plan of St Gall in Brief* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 24.

13. The article by Caroline Bowen may be found at http://speech-language-therapy.com/pdf/acq/webwords11.pdf.

14. See web address in note 9.

15. The French *sou*, like the English shilling, was roughly equal to 12 pennies [pence] or one-twentieth of a pound of silver. One Cluniac *sou* was equal to five Parisian *sou.*

16. Duke William's charter may be found at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/chart-cluny.asp. The other charters may be found in Patrick Geary, *Readings in Medieval History*. 3rd ed. (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2003), pp. 321–7.

17. See Robert C. Lester, *Buddhism: The Path to Nirvana* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

18. Cited in Joan Evans, *Monastic Life at Cluny 910–1157* (Reprint of 1931 edition, Oxford: Archon Books, 1968), p. 14. The following discussions of daily life at Cluny draw extensively on Evans's summary of Ulrich's *Constitutions*, esp. Chapter 5; and on Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, Chapter 6.

19. Evans, *Monastic Life*, pp. 27–8.

20. Evans, *Monastic Life*, pp. 32–3.

21. Evans, *Monastic Life*, p. 74.

22. Evans, *Monastic Life*, pp. 20–1.

23. Lester, *Buddhism*, pp. 13 & 15.

24. *John of Salerno: Life of St Odo of Cluny*, ed. Gerard Sitwell (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), p. 33.

25. Sitwell, *Life of St Odo*, pp. 32–3.

26. Sitwell, *Life of St Odo*, pp. 79–81.

27. Brooke, *Age of the Cloister*, p.78.

28. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 116.

29. Evans, *Monastic Life*, p. 110.

30. Brooke, *Age of the Cloister*, p. 77.

31. Evans, *Monastic Life*, pp. 72–4.

32. James Westfall Thompson, *The Medieval Library* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 225–6.

33. Thompson, *Medieval Library*, pp. 226, 617.

34. Evans, *Monastic Life*, p. 102.

35. Karl Christ, *The Handbook of Medieval Library History* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), p. 203.

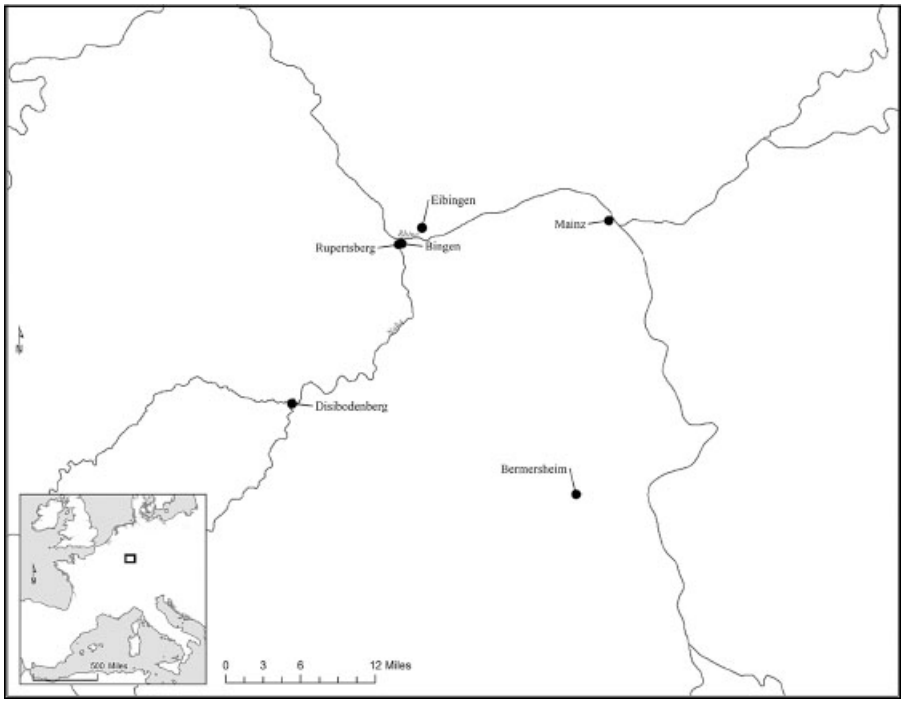
36. Frederick G. Kilgour, *Evolution of the Book* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 70.

37. Kilgour, *Evolution*, p. 71.

38. Evans, *Monastic Life*, pp. 114–5.

39. According to the French art historian Emile Mâle (quoted in Braunfels, *Monasteries*, p. 51).

40. Evans, *Monastic Life*, pp. 99, 129–30; Derek Beales, *Prosperity and Plunder: European Catholic Monasteries in the Age of Revolution, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 265.



Places associated with Hildegard of Bingen. (University of Connecticut Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center [MAGIC])

3

CHILD OBLATES AND PERSONAL FULFILLMENT IN THE MONASTIC LIFE

Not everyone who lived in a monastery wanted to be there, or always wanted to be there, even adults who entered voluntarily. It is possible to imagine many different personal trajectories: people who just went "through the motions," people who settled for that way of life, people who began with very little enthusiasm but gained it over time, people who began with enthusiasm and lost it over time.

At one extreme, some monks and nuns—but not many—ran away from their monasteries. Such people were known as "apostates," that is, men and women who took monastic vows and later, without formal permission or release from their vows, left the monastery and returned to life in the world. For the period 1270–1530 it has been estimated that there were some 120,000 people in monastic life in England (not including servants, laborers, and secular administrators), and among all these many thousands of people, the total number of known "runaway religious" or apostates was 1,088, that is, less than 0.91 percent of the total. These apostates were also overwhelmingly male (nearly 90%). Nuns, who made up about 18 percent of the total number of religious, only accounted for 10.6 percent of the number of known apostates. Were they more faithful to their vows, or does that lower number merely reflect the existence of fewer alternatives for women than men outside the walls of the monastery? Known apostates in England, then, numbered less than 1 out of every 100 religious: it happened, but not very often.[1]

Even with such low rates of apostasy, it cannot be assumed that everyone declared to be "apostate" was indeed someone who had renounced his or her vows and left the community. Not every charge of apostasy was accurate or clear-cut. Agnes de Bowes, prioress of Withorpe Priory (Lincolnshire), was the only member of her community to survive the plague epidemic of the years around 1350, and was found wandering about alone, like a lost soul, in 1359. She was declared to be "in apostasy," but what seems to have happened was that after the destruction of the community, Withorpe was annexed to another monastery in 1354 and Agnes, unable to settle

there (and perhaps still traumatized), ran away in 1359.[2] Margaret de Prestwich claimed that relatives had forced her to enter Seton Priory (Cumberland) at the age of eight, and that she had remained there "as in a prison," for several years, under protest. One can imagine the scene when, on the day she was to take her vows, realizing that this would disinherit her (as this was one of the consequences of taking vows), she pretended to be ill but was physically carried to the church and blessed, in spite of her cries and protests that she would not stay there. She later fled the house, got married, had children, and petitioned the pope to be freed from monastic observance. The bishop who was appointed to investigate her case found in her favor in 1383. As one historian has said of this story, "it is satisfactory to know that one energetic girl at least succeeded in making good her protests and in escaping from her prison."[3] In 1298 one Henry le Chamberlain tried to disinherit his elder brother, Simon, by declaring that Simon had taken monastic vows at Little Malvern Priory in Worcestershire, and that he had apostasized eight years earlier and was now living in an adulterous union. The case was heard in an ecclesiastical court (where such issues were adjudicated), and there the head of the community testified that Simon had indeed entered the priory in November 1289, but that within a year he had announced his intention to leave and had done so, and therefore he was not professed.[4] The sensationalist stereotype of monks and nuns running off together is also not supported by the evidence: in the same study using English evidence, only three instances were found for the 300 years between 1240 and 1540, one involving a nun from Godstow Abbey (discussed in Chapter Five). Such low rates of apostasy help frame a discussion about the reality of personal satisfaction in the monastery.

That many found the monastic life difficult, and some found it unbearable, is not hard to understand; indeed, the subject of the harshness, the "living death," of monastic life, was well developed in monastic writings, and there is no reason to think it was merely a literary theme. The point is cleverly made in a story told about Saint Bernard, abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux from 1115 to 1153. One day he passed a crowd of people gathering around a gallows to watch the execution of a notorious brigand, and intervened to save the man's life. "Hand this murderer over to me," he said, "I want to string him up with my own hands.… You sentenced him to a short agony and a sudden death; I shall see that he is crucified slowly and dies a very protracted death. You would let the body hang on the gibbet for a day or two; I shall ensure that he lives and hangs, nailed to the cross, for many years in continual expiation." Bernard duly led the man away and made him a lay brother at Clairvaux, where he

took the name Constant and lived for the next thirty years.[5] More grimly, one monk of Rievaulx called his life at that monastery

> that death without end which the cloistered always endure.… Everything here and in my nature are opposed to each other. I cannot endure the daily tasks. The sight of it all revolts me. I am tormented and crushed down by the length of the vigils, I often succumb to the manual labour. The food cleaves to my mouth, more bitter than wormwood. The rough clothing cuts through my skin and flesh down to my very bones. More than this, my will is always hankering after other things, it longs for the delights of the world and sighs unceasingly for its loves and affections and pleasures.[6]

Yet some of the "cloistered" did find pleasure, of a very monastic kind, that was for them better than anything to be found in the world outside. From the writings of Ailred, abbot from 1147 to 1167 of the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx in Yorkshire, England, we get a supremely confident, self-contained but generous and outward-looking view of monastic life, and this for a monastic order renowned for the severity and harshness of its regime.

> Our food is scanty, our garments rough; our drink is from the stream and our sleep often upon our book. Under our tired limbs there is but a hard mat; when sleep is sweetest we must rise at a bell's bidding.… Self-will has no scope; there is no moment for idleness or dissipation.… Everywhere peace, everywhere serenity, and a marvelous freedom from the tumult of the world. Such unity and concord is there among the brethren, that each thing seems to belong to all, and all to each.… To put all in brief, no perfection expressed in the words of the gospels or of the apostles, or in the writings of the Fathers, or in the sayings of the monks of old, is wanting to our order and our way of life.[7]

For Ailred "freedom" does not mean a boundless scope for the self and one's own will, but freedom from secular dangers and cares, and the presence of unity and concord. For such a person, the monastic life was not just an escape from the tumult of the world, it was its own source of joy, as seen in the writings of another Cistercian author, celebrating the friendship and companionship of monastic life:

> Those who have none to share in their good fortune or their grief, none on whom they can unload their troubles, no one to whom they can communicate some sudden glorious illumination are like brute beasts. "Woe unto him who is alone, for when he falls he

has none to lift him up!" … But what happiness, security and joy to have another self to talk with![8]

At the other end of the spectrum, then, from those fleeing their communities are those who entered when young, spent their whole lives there, and flourished, finding deep and evidently lasting happiness and fulfillment. This type will be the major focus of the present chapter. It is a segment of the monastic population that can be examined in some detail because many of the most prolific monastic authors of the Middle Ages entered that life as children. Some were given by their parents to monasteries as oblates (Latin *oblatus*, "offered"), others chose to enter and were able to do so in their youth. To focus on such cases connects with broader questions already raised about what led someone to adopt the monastic way of life, and how that way of life shaped his or her ideas, personality, and identity throughout life. Among those who felt at a young age a desire for the monastic life, entered upon it early, found its ways congenial, and took advantage of the possibilities it offered were Bede of the monastery of Jarrow in Northumbria, northern England; Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim in northern central Germany; Guibert, abbot of Nogent in northern France; and Hildegard of Bingen in western central Germany. All four of these individuals were prolific and innovative authors: between them they have left behind over 300 separate works,[9] in fields as diverse as music, poetry, drama, history, autobiography, science, medicine, and social commentary, as well as the more typical genres of biblical commentary and saints' lives.

THE VENERABLE BEDE (672/3–735)

> I was born in the territory of the monastery [Wearmouth and Jarrow]. When I was seven years of age I was, by the care of my kinsmen, put into the charge of the reverend abbot Benedict and then of Ceolfrith, to be educated. From then on I spent all my life in the monastery, applying myself entirely to the study of the Scriptures; and amid the observance of the discipline of the Rule and the daily task of singing in the church, it has always been my delight to learn or to teach or to write.

Bede's brief account of himself comes at the end of his most famous book, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People*, finished c. 731, when he was about fifty-nine years old. It is one of the few statements he ever made about himself in all his many works. This "testament of a lifetime of peace, fulfillment and joy,"[10] penned more than twelve centuries ago, is well worth lingering over: it is a

personal avowal of Bede's deep satisfaction in all aspects of the monastic life, its discipline, its singing, its devotion to the study of Scripture, its opportunities for reading, meditation, and the life of the mind. Indeed in all of his writings "there is a quality of concentrated attention to his life as a monk and unaffected delight in it."[11] For the light it sheds on the quality and potentialities of daily life in the monastery, Bede's testament is especially valuable.

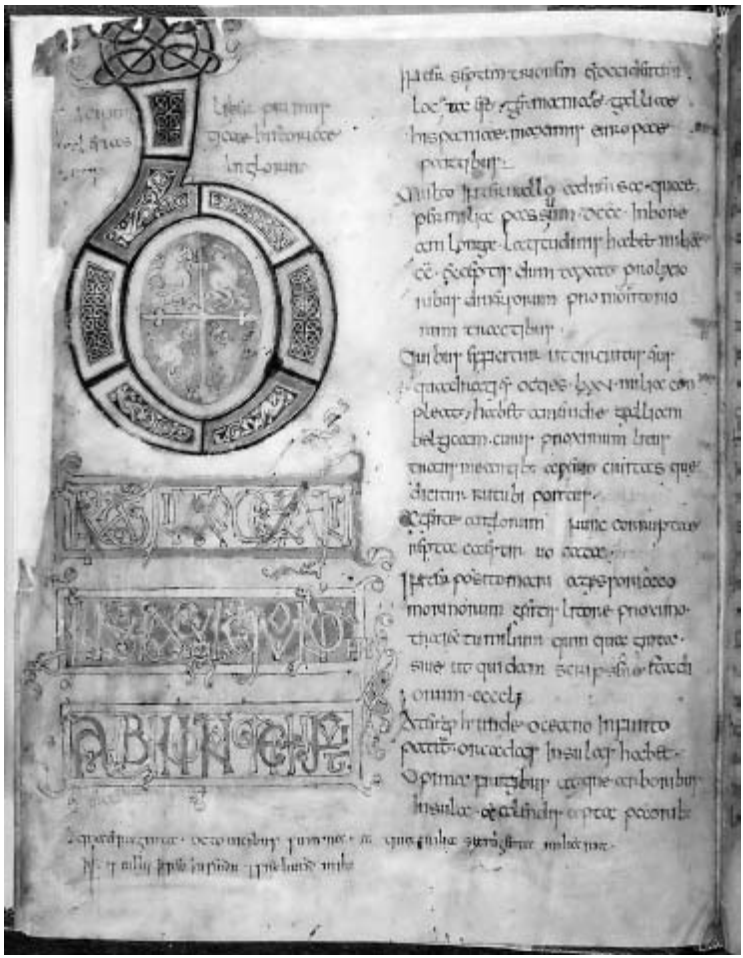
The monastery of Wearmouth (built at the "mouth" of the Wear River in northeastern England) was founded, on land donated by a northern English king, by a nobleman turned monk, Benedict Biscop, in 674 (i.e., the year after Bede was born. Thus, when he entered Wearmouth, at the age of seven, about the year 680, it was a very new foundation). Assisting Benedict Biscop was another nobleman who had embraced the monastic life, Ceolfrith. Several years later (681) they together founded a "sister" monastery at Jarrow, located about seven miles away on the Tyne River, to which Bede was transferred shortly thereafter, and where he remained until his death about fifty years later. Although his life was one of prayer, labor, and scholarship, it was not without trauma and incident of its own. In 686, when Bede was about thirteen years old, plague broke out in northern England and killed many of the inhabitants of both Wearmouth and Jarrow. It is recorded in *Anonymous Life of Ceolfrith* (written c. 710) that the dead included all those who could read or preach or properly sing the Divine Office, except Abbot Ceolfrith himself "and one small boy, who has been brought up and taught by him and who until the present day holds the rank of a priest in the same monastery and commends the abbot's laudable actions in words and writing to all who wish to know them."[12] Historians agree that this "little boy" was Bede himself, whose numerous works include *The History of the Abbots*, an account of the early years of Wearmouth and Jarrow from their foundation up to the year 716 when Abbot Ceolfrith died.

The life Bede led at Jarrow may strike a modern person as narrow and circumscribed in the extreme. In a way, he may have thought so himself: in a commentary on the two wives of Saul (Book of Samuel in the Old Testament), Bede paused to remark, "How can I comment on this who have not even been married to one?"[13] He seems to have left the monastery only three or four times, once to visit a former pupil at York, once to visit an abbot named Wictred for a scholarly discussion, and once to the monastery at Lindisfarne (located about fifty miles north of Wearmouth, on the eastern coast of England) when he was collecting materials for his biography of Saint Cuthbert, the great seventh-century monk, bishop, and missionary. But Bede's life was wide-ranging in terms of the life of the mind. He left behind more than forty works including commentaries on the Bible (which make up

about half of the books he wrote), sermons, letters, saints' lives, books on chronology, and various histories. The libraries of Wearmouth and Jarrow were exceptional for their day, especially given their location in remote northern England where Christianity was still something of a newcomer: together they held about 200 volumes,[14] many of them brought by Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith from Italy and Gaul.

In his many writings, Bede gives an occasional glimpse of the mundane and not-so-mundane details of daily life in a northern English monastery of the seventh and early eighth centuries. For example, he preserves rare evidence of relations between monasteries and the people of the surrounding countryside, peasants only recently converted (in most cases by monastic missionaries) or in the process of being converted to Christianity, who in some respects were suspended between the new culture and traditional pagan ways. In his *Life of Cuthbert*, Bede tells the famous story of how the prayers of Cuthbert saved a group of monks from drowning. The incident occurred at Jarrow, on the banks of the Tyne River where the monks used to transport the wood they needed down the river by rafts. One day, just as they were about to moor their rafts and bring their loads of wood ashore, a powerful wind arose, scattered the rafts, and swept them down toward the mouth of the river and the open sea beyond. The brothers inside the monastery saw their plight, and ran down to the river bank where they gathered and prayed for their brothers "who were on the point of perishing before their very eyes." Cuthbert himself was standing on the opposite bank among a "great crowd" of peasants, who "began to jeer at their way of life, as though they deserved such misfortune for spurning the life of the ordinary man and introducing new, unheard-of-rules of conduct [referring to the monastic regimen of prayer, study, worship and celibacy]." When Cuthbert reprimanded them, saying they should pray for the monks' safety, the peasants replied angrily: "Nobody is going to pray for them. Let not God raise a finger to help them! They have done away with all the old ways of worship and now nobody knows what to do." Cuthbert of course knelt and prayed, and the winds changed and brought the rafts safely back to shore—luckily, "at a very convenient spot beside the monastery." The country-people, ashamed of themselves, acknowledged Cuthbert's powers and "from then on never ceased to praise him." Bede closes his account of this incident with a comment on his source: "The man who told me the story, a worthy brother of this monastery, said he had often heard one of that very group, a simple peasant, incapable of lying, tell the tale before a large audience."[15] In providing this unremarkable piece of information, Bede paints for us a picture of a large group of peasants and monks, gathered together, probably inside the monastic compound, telling

stories and sharing a common (and recent) history.



The first page of Book I of Bede's *History of the English Church and People*, ninth-century manuscript. (The British Library/Robana via Getty Images)

According to Bede, Cuthbert also often left the monastery to preach to people in the villages. These preaching tours would sometimes involve first-time missionary contact, but at other times Cuthbert was maintaining contact with existing Christian communities to prevent them from lapsing into heresy or back into paganism, or even just simply confusion. This is one reason why Bede himself wrote over fifty homilies on the Gospels: these short and lively sermons were useful as reading matter for monks in their private devotion, could be read to the brethren during meals and at chapter meetings, and were also excellent stories to be told in the sort of gathering envisioned above. The appealing quality of such stories suggests the cheek-by-jowl relations of monks and peasants, and the deep familiarity that monks had with the surrounding farming population. One excellent example

of the memorable, human-interest appeal of these simple stories is the miracle of the warm loaf.

> He was travelling alone one day and, about the third hour, chanced to turn into a distant village. He went to the home of a devout married woman, wishing to rest a while; he was more worried about food for his horse than for himself, for winter was just beginning. The woman made him welcome and pressed him to let her prepare him a meal. But the saint would not permit it; he could not eat as it was a Friday … and he set out still fasting. … When it came to vesper time he saw that he would not be able to finish the journey that day; he saw too that there was no human dwelling within reach. He suddenly noticed some shepherds' huts, very makeshift constructions, built for the summer, and deserted. He went in, meaning to stay the night, tied the horse to the wall, and gave it a bunch of straw he had gathered from bits blown out of the roof. He passed the time in prayer. Looking up from his psalms he saw the horse lift its head up and start to pull straw out of the roof. Suddenly a bundle wrapped in a linen cloth fell down with the straw. When his prayers were over he got up to find out what it was and discovered a half loaf still warm and some meat wrapped in the cloth, enough for one meal. "O God," he said, "I was fasting for the love of Thee and in return Thou hast fed both me and my animal, blessed be Thy Name." He broke the bread and gave half to the horse.[16]

This story captures the rugged conditions of life, whether one is farming or missionizing, in this heroic early period, and conveys an image of solitude and hardship that reminds us of Anthony in the Thebaid, or Martin on Gallinaria.[17]

Monkwearmouth and Jarrow were sacked by Vikings in 794 (the year after they sacked Lindisfarne), about sixty years after Bede's death, and again around 860, after which the ruins were abandoned. Some unsuccessful attempts were made to rebuild in the eleventh century, and the great twin monastery complex slipped into the backwaters of history, a powerful reminder of that contradictory quality of monasteries seen from the beginning: sturdy, adaptable, and vulnerable. Yet Bede's many works have survived, probably something close to his entire output, demonstrating the creativity and productivity that could be fostered when personal fulfillment was achieved in the monastery.

HROTSVITHA OF GANDERSHEIM (C. 935–1001)

Hrotsvitha was a canoness who spent most of her life in the imperial monastery of Gandersheim, in northern Germany. Like Bede she has left a few brief references to herself in the prefaces to some of her works. She is best known for the six plays that she wrote for the monastic community where she lived, plays that celebrate women's strength, even against a mighty tyrant. These plays were the first dramatic literature that had been written in the West since the fall of the Roman Empire—so she is not merely the first female dramatist, she is the first European dramatist, the first female German poet, and the first female German historian.[18] Hrotsvitha also wrote eight "sacred legends" in poetic form (e.g., events in the life of the Virgin Mary, the death and martyrdom of various saints), and two historic poems: a history of the reign of the German king and emperor Otto I (936–973), and a history of the monastery of Gandersheim (founded in 852).

Gandersheim was not a typical nunnery: it was founded by members of the royal German dynasty, with which it maintained close connection for centuries. From the start it was intended to be a place where women of the ruling families might go for education and a sphere to exercise their talents, some of them taking the usual, irrevocable monastic vows and becoming nuns, while others (canonesses) were free to come and go, own property, and leave whenever they wished. In the 940s the emperor, Otto I, granted the abbess of Gandersheim extensive legal, economic, and political rights, so that the abbey had its own courts, the right to mint coins (like Cluny), and maintain its own army: thus Gandersheim was, in effect, "a small, proudly independent principality ruled by women."[19] In this privileged and comfortable setting, Hrotsvitha lived as a canoness, a woman of noble birth who seems to have spent part of her youth at the royal court itself, but probably spent most of her life at Gandersheim.

The plays are modeled on the comic, bawdy plays written by the Roman playwright Terence (died c. 159 B.C.). As she states in a preface, she has imitated Terence so that "in the same genre of composition in which the shameless unchaste actions of sensual women were portrayed, the laudable chastity of holy maidens might be celebrated."[20] Written in a community of women, intended for them, and performed by them (at least in a public reading if not a fully-staged performance[21]), Hrotsvitha's plays celebrate a different kind of audacity, that of the early Christian converts and martyrs, both men and women.

Most famous of the plays is the *Dulcitius*, also known as *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agape, Chionia and Irena* (whose names mean Love, Purity, and Peace). Set in the time of the emperor

Diocletian (and based on a legend of the martyrdom of three women in 290, during his reign), the play portrays the bravery and martyrdom of three young sisters. Refusing to renounce their Christian faith, they are imprisoned, where they manage to evade the lascivious embraces of their captors, and ultimately go willingly to their deaths. Without imputing a feminist agenda to the women of Gandersheim, we must still imagine an audience of several dozen educated, highborn, and therefore privileged women regaling themselves with a play, written by one of their own and acted or read aloud by themselves, which celebrates the integrity, purity, and courage of young women. The most famous scene—and deservedly so, for it is indeed funny—is the one in which a pagan governor named Dulcitius, meaning to take sexual advantage of them, makes his way into what he believes to be their prison chamber but ends up in the kitchen. (If Dulcitius is the devil, then the kitchen is Hell—is this more female monastic humor?) He flounders about, fondling the pots and pans, while the young women watch delightedly through a crack in the wall.

What is that clattering noise outside the door? Agape.
That wretched Dulcitius has come in. Irena.
May God protect us! Chionia.
So be it. Agape.
What is this clashing of pots and kettles and frying pans? Chionia.
I will look out. Come, I beg you and peek through this small crack. Irena.
What is it? Agape.
Look, the foolish fellow must be out of his mind; he thinks he is embracing us. Irena.
What is he doing? Agape.
Now he hugs the kettle, now the frying pans, and now he hugs the pots, caressing them with soft kisses. Irena.
How ridiculous! Chionia.
His face, his hands, his clothes! They are soiled and dirty.… Let us see what the soldiers who are waiting for him are going to do when he goes outside … Irena.
Who comes here? one possessed by the devil? or more likely the devil himself? Let us get out of here … Soldiers.
[at the emperor's palace]. Who is this vile, disreputable creature who comes here in these filthy rags? Let's cuff him and pitch him down the steps; don't let him come any closer.[22] Porters.

Hrotsvitha's work does not seem to have been widely known in the Middle Ages. A copy of all of her writings was made soon after her death, written by several different people, including female scribes, and possibly done at Gandersheim itself.[23] This single volume was

discovered in 1493 by a German scholar at the monastery of Saint Emmeram in the city of Regensburg, and published in 1501. In the preface to the plays, Hrotsvitha proclaims herself "the Mighty Voice of Gandersheim," playing on her name (Old Saxon, *Hrothsuith*, "strong voice"). Her birth and wealth, intelligence and creativity have, of course, everything to do with her artistry and innovation—but crucial too was the space provided by the monastic community of which she was part, the learned leisure it sustained, and the encouraging company of like-minded women whom she found herself among.

GUIBERT, ABBOT OF NOGENT AND FIRST MEDIEVAL AUTOBIOGRAPHER (1060–1125)

As abbot of a small monastery in northern France in the early twelfth century, Guibert of Nogent gives us a firsthand view of monastic life and culture in an era of economic, social, and cultural expansion. Guibert was not, like Bede, a child oblate but he spent most of his life in a monastic community, took advantage of the books and the time it provided for contemplation, study, and writing, and wrote numerous works. Groomed for a clerical career from his birth, he actively chose the monastic life when he was a young teenager and left behind, not a brief personal statement, but a complete autobiography.

Around the year 1075, at the age of fifteen, Guibert entered the monastery of Saint-Germer de Fly (pronounced FLEE), located about fifty miles northeast of Paris, and lived there for thirty years. In 1104, when he was in his mid-forties he was (much to his surprise) elected abbot of the monastery of Nogent-sous-Coucy, a small foundation, established recently (1076), and located about seventy miles due east of Saint-Germer. There he spent the rest of his life. He wrote a number of works, including biblical commentaries and a history of the First Crusade, but he is today most famous for his autobiography, the *Monodies* ("Solitary songs"), completed around 1115.[24] What makes this book so unusual is that it is one of the few full autobiographies (as opposed to autobiographical statements) that were written in the Middle Ages—or at least that are known and have survived to the present—and the first one since Saint Augustine wrote his *Confessions* in 397–398 more than 700 years earlier. Once again, a rich and rare text leads, not merely into the monastic interior, but into an individual monastic's interior.

From his earliest years, Guibert felt that he was special. He was born on the vigil of Easter, that is, the evening before Easter Sunday, which is the day of the Resurrection and the central holy day in the Christian calendar (and in the Middle Ages, a day that far outstripped Christmas in importance). Mother and child nearly perished during delivery, a common occurrence in the world of premodern medicine, because the

infant had turned around in the womb. So near to death did they both seem that Guibert's father rushed to the altar of the Blessed Virgin in the family chapel and made a vow that if the baby lived he would be dedicated to the monastic life. Growing up Guibert often heard the story of that night, and how his survival seemed doubtful for some time afterwards: even on the day of his baptism a woman (probably a servant) who was carrying the infant rolled him back and forth between her hands and said "You think he's going to live? Nature almost failed to give him any limbs; she gave him more of a rough sketch than a body."[25] As a man in his fifties, looking back over his life, he recalls growing up with the sense that he had almost died at birth, but that he was also special: "God … you introduced into my wretched heart something—I don't know if it really is hope, or only the appearance of hope—when by your indulgence I was born and even reborn on the day that is the most holy, the most important, and the most longed for by all Christians.… I do confess that I was given to you as a special gift."[26] As a young boy "who hoped to wear the monastic habit," he often had visions of the Blessed Virgin,[27] and he felt different from other children, a sense reinforced because, in keeping with his father's vow, he was intended for a clerical career: his teacher would not let him do anything "whether in speech, judgment, or act, that was not in moderation," including playing outside with other children: "While others my age wandered around wherever they wanted … [I], wearing my clerical attire, would sit like some trained animal and watch the crowds play games."[28]

Guibert's own history made him interested in exploring other people's reasons for entering the monastic life, and he told several stories about men and women who were drawn to it, like Simon, son of Count Raoul of Valois in northern France. After his father's death and burial, Simon felt compelled to move his body because he was buried in a town that Simon feared he would shortly lose control over, and he wanted his father's body to be safely buried elsewhere. Guibert tells us that before moving the body, "the remains were uncovered and laid bare before [Simon's] eyes. When he saw the rotting corpse of his father, once so powerful and fierce, he was moved to contemplate his wretched state, and thereupon all the majesty and glory he once found pleasing, he now began to scorn. Thus he conceived a new will, and finally, burning with desire" he fled land and family and took up the monastic way of life.[29] Adopting the monastic life because one "conceives a new will" was one of the best reasons for entering a monastery, but Guibert is of course aware of other routes to the monastic life: for example, in telling the story of his own parents' inability to consummate their relationship for the first seven years of their marriage (a situation he characterizes as "a

great misfortune"), he reveals that greedy relatives who wanted to seize the family lands tried to force his father (whom Guibert describes as "a young man with a dull mind") to divorce Guibert's mother and become a monk: "Their intentions in this were not for his salvation, but for his properties."[30]

Guibert was always interested in thoughts, feelings, and impressions, especially his own, and he was eager to communicate them. He describes for his reader his reaction when he first went to the monastery of Saint-Germer de Fly as a teenager, where his account of his enthusiasm resembles that of Christina of Markyate, at about the same age:

> From the moment I entered the monastery's church and saw the monks sitting together, such a desire for the monastic life was kindled in me that it could not be extinguished, nor could my spirit find rest, until it received the answer to its prayer.... I reflected upon [the monks'] entire existence and their way of life, and, as wind stokes a fire, my contemplation of them could not but inflame my mind, eager to be like them.

Some months later, when he first put on the monastic habit, he reports his feelings in a language that is almost psychological in its intensity (and also reveals that the youthful practice of reading under the blankets after "lights out" is not new):

> [T]he cloud over my heart seemed to move away, and everything to which I had long been blind during my aimless wanderings now began to take hold of my heart. As well, a tremendous desire for learning suddenly enlivened me: this was my one single pursuit, and if I ever passed a day without any kind of study, I considered it a waste of my life. How often I was thought to be asleep, keeping my tender flesh warm under a blanket, when in fact my spirit was focused on silent recitation or I was reading beneath the covers, in fear that someone would complain![31]

Guibert's desire for learning and his intense application to his studies made him the star pupil of Saint-Germer. Others in the community became so jealous and resented him so much that for a time he wanted to leave that house and go to another monastery. (He was convinced to stay by a dream of his mother's, in which the Virgin told her that she had brought Guibert there and "made him a monk," and would not allow him to be taken away.)[32] But he also describes the fruits of a monastic life: as he became more committed to the monastic regimen his mind "from its depths aspired only to a sincere humility of thought," and he began to "experience that pleasant

solitude of mind" where God abides, and to learn "what unity of the will and what purity of the will were, and what unyielding attention to perpetual poverty meant."[33]

LUCID DREAMING, LIMINAL STATES: NIGHT LIFE IN THE MONASTERY

Guibert's interest in the inner life includes attention to dreams, his and others. Just like modern people, medieval people in general attached importance to dreams and visions, though they gave them different, usually religious, meanings. Not at all surprisingly, given his descent from a knightly family, Guibert seems to have dreamed frequently about dead people who had met their end "by the sword or some other kind of slaughter I had either seen or heard about." (Could he be a case of someone suffering from PTSD?) He interpreted these dreams as images or visions that the devil had placed before his mind's eye, and describes how they terrified his spirit while he was "immersed in sleep." "This affliction may seem ridiculous and childish to anyone who has not experienced it," he writes, "but for those who know its torments it is so catastrophic the fear it inspires … cannot be alleviated … [when someone] in this state … slips into even the slightest slumber, his spirit has no power to strike back against such horrid sights."[34]

Some of the dream experiences he recounts resemble the phenomenon of "lucid dreaming," a kind of borderline state where the dreamer is aware that he is dreaming. Thus, one night in the wintertime, as a young novice, he awoke from a bad dream, uneasy in his mind. Lying in bed, in a state between waking and sleeping, he was comforted by the lamp that "glowed brightly" next to him, when suddenly he heard voices in the dark above his bed, and lost his senses "as if I had fallen asleep." Catching a glimpse of what he thought was a dead man, he heard someone crying out that he had died in the baths and, terrified, he leapt from his bed screaming. Like many monastic authors, Guibert knew that the devil was especially antagonized by those who wished to live uprightly, and that monks and nuns were obvious targets because they were devoted to the highest kind of life; thus, he sees the terrible visitations that he suffered as instances where the devil attacked him because he was filled with the youthful "ardor of a good intention" for the religious life.[35]

Another "wakeful dreaming" story recounted by Guibert takes the reader into the "dream world" interior of monastic life, and provides at least a literary example of how a person's commitment to the monastic regime could change over time. There used to live at Saint-Germer an ill-tempered monk by the name of Otmund who, in fact,

upon first becoming a monk regretted having done so, and only came to "adhere to the monastic rule willingly" after falling seriously ill. His temper does not seem to have improved, however, for one day he drove out of the monastery's church a "poor little man" who was begging for alms. Not long after that Otmund was seized with a sudden and mortal illness. As he lay dying in his cell, moaning and groaning and crying out, the rest of the community gathered around him and struck a board of wood "as was customary, to summon the others to assemble." At that moment, the church custodian ("a good man"), who had gone to bed earlier, heard a different kind of group gathering, a "countless throng of demons assembling" in the monastery's cemetery nearby. "Although his power of understanding was free to perceive all this, some spiritual force suppressed the movement of his tongue and body as the demons entered the church." They passed in front of his bed and then rushed en masse to the cell where the dying monk lay. Guibert carefully notes that even though the man lying in bed was not able to move, he was "mentally aware" of what was happening; indeed he was able to pray to God "in spirit" to be delivered from these demons because he knew that "such an army gathered for a death,"[36] that is, demons are most dangerous at this time, in the borderline state of passing from life to death. Guibert explains that he has recounted this story not because he believes Otmund was "lost to that wicked band," but to remind everyone, including himself, that if the devil could try to tempt Jesus,[37] he could even more easily tempt and ultimately overcome mere humans. Thus, the real moral of the story is that "the devil's madness is on good terms with our impetuous desires,"[38] and that desire, like anger, dreaming, or death, places one in a kind of liminal state or stage that makes him or her vulnerable to the devil's power. Thus, the angry monk is punished for spurning a poor man and the demons who gather, presumably to snatch his soul as he expires, are countered by the prayers of a "good man" who is given a vision of what is happening and knows what to do.

This story with its focus on the dangers of demons and desires, liminal states, and human frailty is reminiscent of a story told 700 years earlier by Augustine in his *Confessions*, the book which inspired Guibert's own *Monodies*: in Rome, Augustine's friend Alypius, who despised the savagery of the gladiatorial games that were held there, was forced by some friends to attend one day. Alypius resolutely shut his eyes, vowing that he would not watch, but when he heard the roar of the crowd it "thrilled him so deeply that he could not contain his curiosity … he opened his eyes, and his soul was stabbed with a wound.… The din had pierced his ears and forced him to open his eyes, laying his soul open to receive the wound which struck it down."

Thereafter, he became addicted to the games until God "rescued" him, much later.[39]

THE MONKS OF SAINT-GERMER OF FLY

An elderly monk at Fly, who had been a knight when he lived in the world, became ill and was wracked with guilt because he had stolen money that had been given to the church there by the faithful. Guibert describes the monastic rituals for attending to the dying and preparing the body for burial: as the monk was in his death throes, the community was summoned (here, by a bell), performed the rituals and said prayers for the dying man, then laid him out on a hair shirt (Guibert mentions elsewhere another burial practice, that of stuffing the sandals of the dead monk with hay to keep them on the feet better).[40] This monk was fortunate enough to be able to confess his sin before he died.[41] Less fortunate was "another monk of ours" who had secretly received two gold coins from a noble lady. He contracted dysentery and died without confessing his sins because he was sitting on a chamber pot when the abbot came to hear his confession. The abbot, "embarrassed to have met the man in such a place," left the room and the monk died shortly thereafter. When the monks undressed his body for bathing in preparation for burial, they found the coins in a small pouch hanging from his shoulder and hidden in his armpit. By the abbot's decision, this covetous and unconfessed monk was not laid to rest in the consecrated burial ground of the monastery, but was buried, without prayers, in a field, with the bag of money placed on his chest; but some of the brothers, pitying him and his fate, remembered him in their private prayers.[42]

A few weeks after this incident, a violent thunderstorm struck the monastery shortly after the community had assembled for Matins (thus, at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning). Before the eyes of everyone there, lightning bolts entered the church, damaged its tower and roof beam, and—terrifyingly—split and shattered a crucifix. Three of the monks standing there were struck and killed by lightning. Others were thrown to the ground (Guibert provides the rather intimate detail that the flames from the thunderbolt singed the hair on their testicles and in their armpits), and some of them, including Guibert, for a time lost all sensation below the waist. Some were so badly injured that it was feared they would die, and they were given the sacrament of last rites. The men who were killed had included two rather unremarkable, even foolish young novices who had been at the monastery for eight months, but the third, Robert, had been an exceptional person in the community: hard-working, honest, helpful (because he was so good-natured he had been nicknamed "Dove"), and an excellent student of Latin. No one doubted that he would be "elevated into the heavenly

ranks" and indeed, not long after the tragedy, one of the brothers had a vision—beautifully described by Guibert—of the three monks traveling together to Saint Peter's in Rome: two of the figures "were in shadows, hardly visible, but the third was dressed in white, moving along swiftly and nimbly, with his customary keenness."[43] As Guibert himself exclaims, "[w]hat events we witness, their meaning hidden in the tiniest details!"[44]

The circumstances surrounding the entrance of another child into the monastic life at Fly can be dated precisely, to the year 1096–1097, the opening year of the First Crusade and the local pogroms against Jews that accompanied them.[45] According to Guibert, a group of men in the city of Rouen who had vowed to go and fight for the Holy Land first attacked the "infidels" in their midst, the Jews of the city. An unknown number of men, women, and children were slaughtered, after being driven out of the church where they had taken refuge. One small boy was spared by a nobleman (doubtless a participant in the massacre) who "took pity" on him, snatched him away from danger, and took him to his mother, the Countess Hélisende of Eu. The child was asked if he wished to become a Christian, and since he "thought he was destined for the same slaughter he had seen his fellow tribesmen suffer, he did not refuse her offer." When he was baptized, a drop of wax that fell from a candle into the baptismal water formed itself into a perfect cross, and this was taken as a sign that this child who was "Jewish by birth" would "possess a faith unusual in our day." Given the name William, after the nobleman who had saved him, he took up instruction in the Latin language (he was evidently a precocious child and had already begun the study of Hebrew). Because his relatives kept trying to get him back, the countess placed him, in effect as a child oblate, in the monastery of Fly. This child, who came to be known as William of Fly, must have arrived at the monastery in the late 1090s, where he would have met Guibert, a seasoned monk in his mid- to late thirties who, as he says, himself "witnessed the young boy's remarkable success." In the course of time, William of Fly became the author of a number of Biblical commentaries.[46] His painful story provides another variant on the theme of entrance into monastic life.

THE HISTORY OF NOGENT

As noted above, Guibert was not only an autobiographer and biblical commentator, he was also an historian, like Bede—and his interests were not confined to famous events like the First Crusade. The scenes of his own early life and monastic profession seemed to him to carry historical weight and importance (hence his autobiography), and he tells their stories accordingly. Just as Bede wrote a *History of the*

Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Guibert in the second book of the *Monodies* includes a history of the abbey of Our Lady of Nogent, the monastery where he was abbot for the last twenty years of his life.

Like most monasteries, Nogent had a foundation legend which, Guibert tells us, was preserved in verse form in a number of manuscripts in the abbey's library in his own day. This colorful legend concerns the building of the first church at Nogent, from which the monastery later developed. According to the tradition (known only from Guibert's writings—the verse texts he mentions have not survived), a British king named Quilius traveled to Jerusalem shortly after the Crucifixion of Jesus, converted to Christianity, and acquired some precious relics, including part of the cloak worn by the Blessed Virgin when she gave birth to Jesus (the kind of relic Guibert would feel a special affinity for). On his way back from the Holy Land he fell ill and died at Nogent and was buried there. A church was built at the site and was later converted to a monastery for the better keeping of the religious life. But based on his own observations of its site, Guibert believed that the religious life was of even greater antiquity there, pointing to the large number of tombs that surrounded the church, which were arranged in a circle around one tomb in the center, and to the ancient vases that were found in these tombs. Based on these artifacts, Guibert concluded that "these were pagan tombs, or very ancient tombs of Christians made in a pagan manner."[47] In suggesting that these might be the graves of ancient Christians buried according to pagan tradition, Guibert reasons here with the insight of a cultural historian: the people buried at Nogent were indeed Christian, but they lived in such an early period that burial custom was still largely based on pagan practice.

Guibert brings the history of Nogent swiftly to the period of his own election and arrival there as the new abbot (1104), noting that the house had been brought to a "suitably advantageous condition" by the previous abbot. He briefly recounts the day of his installation as abbot, the procession of the monks, the first meeting of the community (the chapter meeting), and the sermon he preached in chapter that day. He praises the community of brothers for their reception of him, noting that "so faithful were their confessions that in opening their minds to me, they became as one with me. Even though I believed I had seen monks in other places, I knew of none comparable to them in this regard."[48] Unfortunately, the harmony and goodwill that marked the early relations between the new abbot and the community did not last. Guibert alludes briefly to the "adversities" that the monks later brought upon him, and we know that around the year 1107 he was forced to leave Nogent for a year because of difficulties at the monastery. What those difficulties were is unknown

—indeed it is thought that Book 2 is incomplete, and that the portions that are missing are precisely those sections that explained why Guibert was driven for a time from Nogent (most unfortunately for the historian).[49] It is also in Book 2 that Guibert tells of his mother's death (1106), and reveals one of his primary purposes for writing the *Monodies*, to ask the reader to pray for her soul.[50]

"SINCE WE HAVE BEGUN TALKING ABOUT DEMONS …"[51]

Besides asking his readers to pray for his mother's soul, Guibert had other reasons for writing the *Monodies.* It seems that as a kind of duty, perhaps even a monastic labor, Guibert collects and records these stories so that his monastic audience and others might learn about the many disguises that demons can assume to trouble monks and undermine daily life in the monastery. Thus he provides examples that illustrate how people might avoid demons' "pronouncements" and even "the suggestions of those who speak with them."

One of his stated goals is also to tell stories that have good examples that will be "useful for sermons."[52] Of course monks gave fewer sermons than members of the secular clergy who were charged with care of souls for the laity, but as seen earlier Bede also wrote homilies and other aids for preachers; and sermons were preached in monasteries on numerous occasions, just as Guibert did when he was installed as abbot at Nogent. On that day, he gave a sermon based on a brief passage from the book of *Isaiah* (3:6–7), "A man shall seize his brother, a servant of his father, saying: You have a cloak, you shall be our ruler, and this heap of ruins is under your hand," and so forth. Guibert gave a short sermon, where he is clearly arguing that, as the new abbot of Nogent, he is the "brother" with the "cloak" being asked to govern a "ruin."[53] Also, since many of the stories he relates concern secular clergy and laymen and women, as well as regular clergy, Guibert undoubtedly hoped that his books would circulate outside his own monastery and prove useful to clergy living "in the world." (His own numerous links with the world "outside" the monastery will be explored shortly.)

He tells the story of an elderly, wealthy, and "worn out" nobleman who, deciding to abandon his much younger and sexually demanding wife, had taken monastic vows at Fly. As would befit someone coming to the monastic profession late in life, he was anxious to follow all the rules properly, and was therefore a most attentive listener to any instructions given during chapter meetings. One day during chapter the rule was stated that the monks should not enter the infirmary without a good reason (a prohibition related in spirit to #52 of the *Rule*, "Of the Oratory of the Monastery," which states that the oratory should be "what it is called," a place for prayer, and that "nothing else

is to be done or stored there"; thus the specific purpose of each room and part of the monastery should be respected). Since the old monk lived in the infirmary, owing to his weak physical condition, the prohibition stuck in his memory and—of course—entered his dreams. One night while he was fast asleep, two demons appeared on a bench near his bed. They were, as he later came to understand, demons dressed as wandering monks (so, they were demons pretending to be laymen who were pretending to be monks). Guibert reports that the demons were cloaked, bearded, and going barefoot "as wandering monks usually do"—indeed, "they say" that there was straw stuck between the toes of one of them. Not yet realizing that these people were demons, and irritated at seeing them sitting there and apparently so much at their ease, the old monk angrily ordered them to leave, saying that they were laymen and strangers and had no right to come where even monks could not be without reason (i.e., the infirmary). When the chief demon replied that he had come to learn more of religion from the "pious men" who lived there, the old monk drove them out, saying that such instruction takes place in the cloister, and that it is there that one learns "the obligations of the rule and the rudiments of the holy life," not in the infirmary.[54] In this particular story, demons are not simply engaging in random mischief in the monastery; instead, in order to undermine monastic life, they have specifically targeted a basic principle of the organization of a monastery: the tradition of the proper ordering of place and function in the community.

BOOK 3: GUIBERT, EYE WITNESS AND REPORTER OF AN URBAN REVOLT IN LAON

In Book 3 Guibert gives a—literally—blow-by-blow account of the famous uprising in April 1112 of the commune of the town of Laon, some twenty miles from Nogent. The story he tells is not so much an example of history writing as it is what we would call journalism and contemporary social commentary; and it turns out that the head of a modest provincial monastery is not only well-placed to report on these events—on occasion he is even an influential participant.

At different times, the events associated with the urban revolt draw Guibert into danger. Gerard, a leading citizen of Laon, made the mistake of quarreling with a man named Gaudry, the corrupt newly elected bishop of that diocese, who promptly had Gerard murdered in the cathedral church: he was stabbed with swords while praying before a crucifix, his hands joined in prayer before his chest. It was Guibert, a monastic cleric, who was asked to give the sermon of reconciliation in the cathedral after the murder, and the sermon he gave on that occasion (as was typical of medieval sermons) was based on biblical texts. The texts he chose, however (Psalm 69:2 and Jer. 4:10), might well be considered loaded, given recent events: "Save me, God, since the waters have entered into my soul; I am stuck in deep mire, and there is no foothold," and "a sword has reached to your soul."[55] After his sermon Guibert boldly called for the excommunication of the murderers and all who aided or sheltered them, and a sentence of anathema was duly pronounced. When news of these actions reached the bishop's supporters, they "turned their hatred" against Guibert, and Bishop Gaudry made a very public show of his animosity: on his way back from Rome (where he had gone in order to be out of town when the murder was committed), the first church he passed when he crossed the border into his own diocese was the monastic church of Nogent, "the church of Blessed Mary, whom I serve at God's command." Gaudry did not stop there, however, but he did have a "lengthy conversation" right next to it with his loyal followers (i.e., so Guibert could hear them), and then went on to enjoy hospitality at the castle of Coucy! "When I learned of his behavior," Guibert writes, "completely disgusted, I avoided his sight entirely and did not greet him at all." Giving Gaudry's ruthlessness, this seems like Guibert is living dangerously.

Bishop Gaudry then entered the city, gathered an assembly and conducted mass, during which he declared he would excommunicate those who had punished the conspirators (not the murderers!) in Gerard's murder. In this very public and dangerous setting, Guibert promptly turned to one of his "fellow abbots" sitting next to him and

whispered indignantly that this was an outrage, and that the bishop should be excommunicating the murderers who had polluted the church with blood. Attentive to every move Guibert makes, Bishop Gaudry notices his "murmuring" and asks him "What are you saying, lord abbot?" The moment passes, but one has the feeling that Guibert has made a narrow escape.

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN (1098–1179)

Hildegard of Bingen is one of a handful of people who are always described as being a "polymath," that is, someone who has deep knowledge across many fields or disciplines.[56] Mystic, visionary, poet, musician and composer, naturalist, theologian, hagiographer, also exorcist and preacher—she was all this and more. In her own day she was known as the "Sibyl of the Rhine," a prophet, consulted by kings, popes, emperors, and others. Like Bede, Hildegard did not write an autobiography as Guibert did, but rather left a number of autobiographical comments scattered here and there in her many works, while others were incorporated into a *vita* or biography of her that was begun, while she was still alive, by a monk named Godfrey who knew her well and had acted as her secretary. Born into a noble family in the town of Bermersheim, near Mainz, Germany, and the youngest of ten children, her parents decided to offer her, literally, as a "tithe" (i.e., "tenth") to the church, dedicating her to a religious life for which she must have felt destined: she had her first vision in her "third year of life" when she saw "so great a brightness that my soul trembled."[57] In 1106, when she was eight years old, they placed her in the care of Jutta of Spanheim, a devout noblewoman, for her early education; and when Jutta removed to a small cell near the monastery of Disibodenberg to take up the anchoretic life several years later, she took young Hildegard with her. From Jutta she learned to read and possibly also received some music education (Godfrey, her biographer, related that Jutta taught her "how to make joyful sound on the ten-stringed psaltery"[58]). If the cell was attached to the church of the monastery at Disibodenberg (its exact location is not certain), Jutta and her youthful companion would have heard the monks' recitation of the Divine Office everyday—thus Hildegard from her earliest years would have grown up hearing monastic chant and prayer.

A twelfth-century miniature showing Hildegard of Bingen at work. (Biblioteca Statale, Lucca, Italy/The Bridgeman Art Library)

That small cell later became a convent, remaining attached to the larger male monastic house at Disibodenberg, and sometime around the age of fifteen, Hildegard took religious vows there. In 1136 she was elected abbess, and lived there until she founded a second

monastery at Rupertsberg, around 1150 and, in 1165, at Eibingen, across from Rupertsberg, on the other side of the Rhine River. She spent the rest of her life at Eibingen (where her tongue and heart are preserved in a reliquary, or relic case, in the parish church today). These are the places where she passed her life—when she was not out on tour, preaching reform to clergy and laity alike across Germany—with papal blessing (the last one when she was in her seventies).

She first communicated her spiritual visions, which she had throughout life, to Jutta, who told them to a monk named Volmar at Disibodenberg. In a pattern often seen, where an exceptional female religious finds one or more champions among the male religious, Volmar was to be her confidant and support for the rest of his life (he died in 1173, six years before Hildegard died). It may have been her election as abbess in 1136 that gave her the confidence to reveal, soon thereafter, more of the content of her inner life—she herself also reports feeling a tremendous improvement in her health at this time, and perhaps the two events are related. At the age of forty-two, around the year 1141, she beheld a blinding light, acquired a sudden and complete understanding of the Bible, which she had never formally studied, and received a command from God to "say and write what you see and hear" (and to make sure she got the message it was repeated three more times). She hesitated, became ill (which she took as a sign of God's displeasure at her stalling), and then received encouragement from Volmar and from the abbot of Disibodenberg, who urged her to write down her visions. This led her to begin work on *Scivias* (*Sci vias Domini*, "know the ways of the Lord"), an account of twenty-six visions which she had received, which she describes and explains. This massive work (over 500 pages in English translation) took her ten years to complete. Meanwhile the abbot told the archbishop of Mainz, who told the pope, Eugene III, who was at that time attending a church council in nearby Trier (November 1147–February 1148). Portions of Hildegard's work were read aloud by the pope to an admiring crowd of clergy at that assembly, a group that included Bernard of Clairvaux himself. The pope sent Hildegard a letter of encouragement and support, and from this point on she continued to gain acceptance in clerical and other circles, numbering among her correspondents and well-wishers not only clergy but also abbots, kings, queens, and others (including Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Empress Irene of Byzantium, and the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa, whom Hildegard wrote to in 1152 to congratulate him on being elected king of Germany).

Ruins at Disibodenberg, Germany, Hildegard's first monastery. (AP Photo/Martin Oeser)

Her fame led to the usual influx of disciples and admirers from among the nobility of the area, and in 1150, she received divine inspiration to establish a new and independent community for herself and her growing community of nuns. God showed her the place, Rupertsberg on the Rhine, about twenty miles away—taking the wealth and endowments of the convent at Disibodenberg with them, gifts that had been increasing with Hildegard's fame! (The convent she established later at Eibingen in 1165 was founded in part to handle the overflow of nuns from Rupertsberg). So difficult did the transition become that in 1155 Hildegard was forced to go back to Disibodenberg and address the monks in their cloister, "petitioning" them for this transfer, which they duly granted, and the transfer was, as Hildegard reports, entered into a codex. Her appearance before the abbot and monks was remarkable, not only because the presence of any woman in a male monastic house was rare and carefully controlled, but also because, as one scholar sees it, her address to them was "not so much a petition (though she calls it that) as a fulmination."[59] Her writing continued in this early period at Rupertsberg, and may have included some of her hymns, her scientific works, and the "unknown language" and "alternative alphabet" that she made up, for reasons unknown: whether as part of a secret code or as activities on a par with crossword puzzles.[60]

Hildegard experienced repeated bouts of debilitating illness. On one occasion she felt an "aerial fire" burning in her womb, became so ill that she seemed on the point of death, and was laid out on a cloth on

the ground in preparation, the community gathered around her for the last rites. She heard an angel inviting her to die and come to heaven, but recovered.[61] Her visions were not dreams or daydreams, but were "absolutely concurrent with physical sight … with all that she saw in her soul, she remained physically lucid throughout."[62] Modern researchers have suggested that the quality and content of her visions are consistent with symptoms of people suffering from severe migraine, especially the falling stars, concentric luminous circles, and blinding lights;[63] but few would reduce her profound inner life to a health condition.

One is not surprised to learn that Hildegard was also an exorcist. A woman of the city of Cologne, who had been tormented by a devil for eight years had applied for help to a community of monks, with no luck, and then came to the "Sibyl of the Rhine." Hildegard composed, for the occasion, a rite of exorcism, and duly exorcised the demon—this was an event that became famous at the time. In the last years of her life she was troubled with a conflict with church authorities at Mainz because an excommunicated man had been buried in her graveyard. Happily, the controversy was resolved before her death in 1179. Her long and eventful life, most of it lived within the walls of a monastery, was never free of incident.

Like Guibert, Hildegard believed she had been specially marked out by God, a special recipient of divine favor, in her case because of her visions. Lots of people had visions, as we have seen, but very few women who had them were able to gain the attention and approval of so many powerful figures within the church hierarchy, from obscure monks and local abbots all the way to the pope. Her sense of being special and chosen must have owed something as well to the fact that her long life in the monastery began, at the age of eight, by being immured with a loving female teacher who taught her to read and to sing.

A CONTEMPLATIVE CULTURE

Monks and nuns were not required to be especially learned, but those of a scholarly and sedentary frame of mind could take advantage of the opportunities for reading, writing, and learning, as amply illustrated in the histories of the four youthful monastics given here. Although in the *Rule* Saint Benedict makes allowances for those who are not literate, the demands of the Divine Office (to be said eight times in each 24-hour period, 7 days a week, 365 days a year), and the desirability of engaging in pious reading (*lectio divina*) fostered the tradition that monks and nuns should be able to read. Thus, monasteries had to be schools to educate their own residents, and sometimes monasteries established schools for the sons and daughters

of the laity. Nunneries, more financially precarious than male monastic houses, often received local children for what was basically a primary school education, in order to make extra money.

Schools required books, and of course the monastic life itself required books, for prayer, celebration of the liturgy, and private meditation. Because books were expensive, most monasteries produced what they needed themselves in their own *scriptoria* (writing offices). The books they copied included many of the texts of classical pagan and Christian antiquity, and in the early Middle Ages, under often difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances (as seen in the story of Wiborada), the monks and nuns of Europe kept alive a tradition of learning and scholarship, preserving ancient texts and, as seen vividly in the cases of Bede, Hrotsvitha, Guibert, and Hildegard, adding new works to the monastic library.

TYPICAL MONASTIC TEXTS

What sorts of texts were produced in monasteries? The monastery favored certain literary genres, many of them sampled in these pages, such as hagiography, the famous *Life of St Benedict*, written by Pope Gregory, and Sulpicius Severus's *Life of St Martin*, which was written when Sulpicius was living in monastic retirement. Foremost among types of monastic texts is, of course, the Bible, commentaries on the Bible, and the works of the Fathers of the early Church, such as Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose.

Bible commentaries explore the meanings and layers of meanings of different books or passages in the Bible. Bede, who wrote numerous commentaries (e.g., on *The Book of Tobias*, and *On Eight Questions*, including Q1: "On the Wise Men who Adored the Lord at His Birth, and on the Star"[64]) defined Biblical commentary as "searching out the wondrous things of the Scriptures carefully and with [the] whole soul."[65] A good example of another early monastic commentator is Haimo of Auxerre (d. c. 875), a monk at the Abbey of Saint-Germain in Auxerre, in north-central France. He wrote a commentary on the Old Testament *Book of Jonah*, which contains the famous story of the prophet Jonah who was swallowed by a whale and spent three days and three nights in its belly. Following the traditional method, Haimo expounds the meaning of every line from the text, frequently citing other sections of the Bible to extend and confirm his point, and especially pointing out where the contents of the Old Testament "prefigure" that of the New Testament. Here, for example, is his comment on one famous line:

> *And Jonah prayed to the Lord his god from the belly of the fish, and said* (Jonah 2:2). The prophet having been received into the belly

> of the whale, after he felt himself to be safe, not despairing concerning the mercy of God, he turned to complete supplication, knowing the Lord would be very much with him in tribulation, just as He Himself promises the just man, "I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him" (Psalm 90:15).… Moreover the belly of the underworld, that is *the belly of the fish*, was of such great magnitude that it swelled up to the likeness of hell. These things can refer to Christ allegorically, who through David says: "You have delivered my soul out of the lower hell" (Psalm 85:13). For David himself was living in the inferno, "free among the dead" (Psalm 87:6).[66]

The study and writing of history were also deeply appealing to monastics, for a number of reasons: there were classical models to emulate, and the study of history appealed to the "conservative tendency" in monasticism.[67] Monastic history-writing seeks to instruct, in order to do good, to praise God, and provide examples—in short monks care about the future! Bede provides a detailed account of the process of historical scholarship and writing in his prologue to the *Life of Cuthbert* (written about 721), a book that was commissioned by Cuthbert's community at Lindisfarne. Bede described his work as "a clear investigation of the truth in simple terms." After exhaustively interviewing people who knew the saint, he wrote out his account and sent a copy to Cuthbert's community at Lindisfarne, where it was read aloud in chapter over a period of two days, approved, and declared "fit to be read and transcribed by all whose holy zeal moved them to do so" (this is the medieval act of publication, literally becoming "public").[68] Guibert's history of himself, and of his own monastery (to say nothing of his major history of the First Crusade), Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and *History of the Abbots*, Hrotsvitha's history of the Ottonian dynasty, are all examples of original histories written about people, events or areas close to the monastic author, and obviously dear to his and her heart.

Saints' lives were "written for devotional purposes either to promote the veneration of a saint or to provide texts for reading [*legenda*] during the divine office."[69] These were often collected in a *legendarium.* When read during the Divine Office, they glorified God "in the devotional exercise itself in which the text is to be read"; so the legend needed to be written to be not only informative but also "worthy of being read aloud at divine office, without, at the same time, unduly prolonging it."[70] Sometimes the writing of a *legend* for the Divine Office might lead a monastic author to write a *vita* or biography of that religious figure, borrowing details from other saints' lives or sometimes just making them up. In so doing, the

hagiographer's intention was not so much to relate a true story as to "expound a moral doctrine which itself is always true."[71] But not everyone liked this! The monk Letaldus of Micy who wrote a *Life of St Julian* understands the desire to please God but argues that we should not provoke Him by falsehoods! "As if falsehood could possibly contribute to the glory of the saints, who, had they lied, would never have attained to sanctity." In his life of Saint Julian (where he debunks the belief that Julian, a contemporary of the apostles, was sent to Gaul where he founded the church of Le Mans), Letaldus points out, with some asperity, that there is much in Julian's life "that had already been said, and in practically the same words, about St Clement, St Denis and St Furse."[72] What would Letaldus have said of Guibert's story about King Quilius?

For his part, Guibert also wrote a famous treatise entitled *On the Relics of Saints* (completed c. 1120) in which he castigated the monks of the monastery of Saint-Médard, in nearby Soissons, who claimed that among other relics they also possessed one of Jesus's baby teeth, which he lost at the age of nine. Angrily addressing the monks directly, Guibert writes "you will not deny that the Lord, whose tooth you claim to have in your hands, has been resurrected. Assuming you agree, let me ask whether he has been resurrected partly or wholly?" If wholly, the tooth cannot be his, and if partly, then his promises about everyone's resurrection cannot be true.

> In your wish to exalt your church with pilgrims' riches and to claim that your church is far nobler and grander than others, you have reached the extremes of madness and the depths of a reprobate understanding and—this may be an awful thing to say, but it needs to be said—you are willing to drag into your lies the words not only of the prophets, but even of Lord Jesus himself.[73]

Guibert of course believes in miracles, the saints, and the power of relics: what he despises and fears are false saints and false relics, as he exemplifies in another story:

> For I have seen—and I am ashamed to tell this story—a common boy, the squire of a certain knight, or so they say, who died on an estate near Beauvais two days before Easter. The estate pertained to the rights of a certain extremely well-known abbot. People began to attribute unmerited sanctity to the dead boy because of the holy day when he died [i.e. Good Friday, the day of the Crucifixion]. Then after some peasants, desirous of novelty, began to honor him, suddenly all the nearby ignorant country folk carried oblations and candles to his grave. Why go on? The grave was covered with offerings, a house was built to enclose the

> place, and hordes of pilgrims … were drawn there. That ever-so-wise abbot and his religious monks saw it all and encouraged the contrived miracles, seduced by the piles of pilgrims' gifts.[74]

As he observed bitterly, "[e]ven monks, let alone clerics, do not restrain themselves from this kind of dirty profit."[75]

The education that monks or nuns received in a monastic house is best described as a "religious formation," that is, they were educated "individually, under the guidance of an abbot, a spiritual father, through the reading of the Bible and the Fathers, within the liturgical framework of the monastic life."[76] (This type of training is clearly exemplified in the lives of Bede, Hildegard, and Guibert). Monastic reading is oriented toward meditation and prayer—its "orientation" is "wisdom and appreciation."[77] *Lectio divina* is prayerful reading that is active, in the sense that it is reading aloud—one says the words aloud and has a "muscular memory" of the words as well as an aural memory of the words heard, "inscribing the sacred text in the body and in the soul." As we saw earlier (Chapter One), this process was described by the Latin term *ruminatio*, rumination, that is, chewing, referring to the "repeated mastication" of the divine words. So "to meditate is to attach oneself closely to the sentence being recited and weigh all its words in order to sound the depths of their full meaning." One reads a text and repeats it, over and over, learning it "by heart," and making it one's own.

Above all one reads the Bible: as Benedict himself declares in the *Rule* (#73), "What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?" This is a contemplative culture, where one reads, contemplates, and meditates. The goal is to effect a true conversion, conversatio, a new person turning to a new life. We recall Chapter 58 in the *Rule of St Benedict*, "concerning the manner of receiving brothers," where the novice during the course of his one-year novitiate (during which he may freely leave at any time) must "promise perseverance in his steadfastness"; and at the end of the year, when he is received, he must "in the oratory, in the presence of all, make promise concerning his steadfastness and *the change in his manner of life* and his obedience to God and to His saints." This is, of course, just the beginning of *conversion*, to be followed by a lifetime of contemplation, prayer, and reading. Saint Benedict, himself a kind of child monastic, said that his *Rule* is useful only for the beginning of conversion; those who are hastening on to the "perfection of conversion" must read the works of the Fathers and Scripture (#73).

NOTES

1. Discussion and statistics in this paragraph are from F. Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England, 1240–1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 67–8, 71–3, 77–8. The definition of "apostate" is on p. 1.

2. Logan, *Runaway Religious*, p. 72; Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275–1535* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 457.

3. Logan, *Runaway Religious*, p. 259; Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 36.

4. Logan, *Runaway Religious*, p. 23.

5. *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, trans. Pauline Matarasso (New York: Penguin, 1993), pp. 297–8.

6. *Walter Daniel's Life of Ailred*, trans. F. M. Powick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 36, 30.

7. *The Mirror of Charity: The Speculum Caritatis of St Aelred of Rievaulx*, trans. Geoffrey Webb (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1962), Book 2, Chapter 17.

8. Quoted in *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings*, trans. Mark Atherton (New York: Penguin, 2001), p. xvii.

9. The breakdown is (counting a book, or a treatise, or a letter, each as a single item), roughly, as follows: Bede, about 40; Hrotsvitha, about 16; Guibert, about 10; and Hildegard, about 250.

10. C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*. 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, Inc., 2001), p. 60.

11. Benedicta Ward, "Preface," in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, trans. W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holde (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1999), p. xii.

12. "The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith," in *The Age of Bede*, trans. J. F. Webb, ed. D. H. Farmer (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 218.

13. D. H. Farmer, "Introduction," in *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin, 1990), pp. 33–4.

14. Rosaline Love, "The World of Latin Learning," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio and George Hardin Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 43.

15. "The Life of Cuthbert," in *The Age of Bede*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 48–9.

16. "The Life of Cuthbert," in *The Age of Bede*, pp. 50–1.

17. Another later story preserved in the writings of the Cistercians captures the close relations between peasants and monks that was so ordinary a feature of medieval life (a theme we return to in Chapter Six). There was a lay brother who worked at Clairvaux as a plowman, "a simple man and pure of heart," who in his sleep had a vision of Jesus walking alongside him in the field, on the other side of the team of oxen, "holding the goad [a long pointed stick] in his own sweet hand and driving the oxen with him." This lay brother, who told one of the monks about his vision, soon afterward became ill and died; and Saint Bernard, the abbot of Clairvaux, "reflecting on the vision" knew that the brother had been saved since God, who had "worked at his side," would not fail to save the man "he had so courteously toiled alongside in the field." Matarasso, *The Cistercian World*, p. 297. (In the eighteenth century, William Blake, the English printer, artist, visionary, and mystic, as a child one day saw angels walking in a field among the laborers during harvest.)

18. *The Dramas of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, trans. Katharina M. Wilson (Saskatoon, Sask: Peregrina, 1985), p. 2.

19. Peter Dronke, "Hrotsvitha," in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 55.

20. Quoted in Dronke, "Hrotsvitha," p. 69.

21. Dronke, "Hrotsvitha," pp. 57–9, believes that Hrotsvitha's plays were performed publicly, and were written with that end in mind. The issue of performance of her plays is still alive, in another way: see the theatre blog of Lyn

Gardner, "My favourite plays I've never seen," in *The Guardian* (online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/apr/02/neglected-plays), where she relates that in 2006, the feminist theater group "Guerrilla Girls on Tour" announced they would present an award to "professional theatres [that] scrap their plans of producing yet another production of a Greek tragedy and instead produce a play by Hrotsvitha."

22. "Dulcitius," in *Medieval and Tudor Drama*, ed. John Gassner (New York: Bantam Books, 1963), pp. 6–7.

23. *The Dramas of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, Wilson, Intro, pp. 15–16.

24. Citations of Guibert's book are drawn from *Guibert of Nogent: Monodies and On the Relics of Saints: The Autobiography and a Manifesto of a French Monk from the Time of the Crusades*, trans. Joseph McAlhany and Jay Rubenstein (New York: Penguin Books, 2011) (hereafter *Guibert*) and, in a few cases, another translation, *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, trans. Paul J. Archambault (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) (hereafter *Confession*).

25. *Guibert*, pp. 9–10.

26. *Guibert*, pp. 9, 11.

27. *Guibert*, p. 52.

28. *Guibert*, p. 14.

29. *Guibert*, pp. 25–6.

30. *Guibert*, p. 31.

31. *Guibert*, pp. 44–5.

32. *Guibert*, pp. 50–2.

33. *Guibert*, pp. 65–6.

34. *Guibert*, p. 46.

35. *Guibert*, p. 47.

36. *Guibert*, pp. 78–9.

37. Matt 4:1–11.

38. *Confession*, p. 79.

39. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 122–3.

40. *Guibert*, p. 76.

41. *Guibert*, pp. 68–9.

42. *Guibert*, pp. 70–1.

43. *Confession*, p. 82.

44. *Guibert*, p. 77.

45. *Guibert*, pp. 97–9.

46. *Guibert*, p. 307; note 29.

47. *Guibert*, p. 82.

48. *Guibert*, p. 92.

49. *Guibert*, Intro, p. xi and p. 306, note 23.

50. *Guibert*, p. 96.

51. *Confession*, p. 89.

52. *Confession*, p. 178.

53. *Confession*, pp. 107–8 and note 18.

54. *Guibert*, pp. 100–1.

55. *Guibert*, p. 121.

56. The following discussion of Hildegard draws upon Peter Dronke, "Hildegard of Bingen," in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 144–201; and Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098–1179: A Visionary Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

57. Quoted in Dronke, "Hildegard," p. 145.

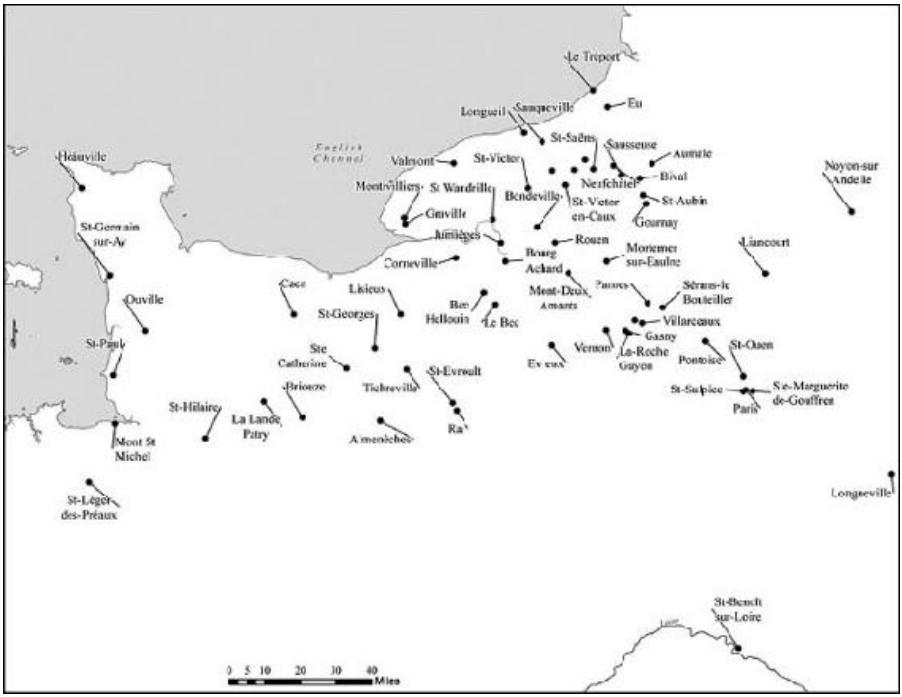
58. *The Life of the Saintly Hildegard, by the Monks, Gottfried of Disibodenberg & Theodoric of Echternach*, trans. Hugh Feiss (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1999), p.

26.
59. Dronke, “Hildegard,” p. 154.
60. As suggested by Flanagan in *Hildegard*, p. 7.
61. Dronke, “Hildegard,” pp. 159–60.
62. Dronke, “Hildegard,” p. 147.
63. Dronke, “Hildegard,” p. 147; and see Flanagan, *Hildegard*, pp. 199–210.
64. Pp. 149–51 in Foley and Holde, trans., *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*.
65. Cited p. xv in Foley and Holder, trans., *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*.
66. *Haimo of Auxerre, Commentary on the Book of Jonah*, trans. Deborah Everhart (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1993).
67. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 156.
68. Webb, *Age of Bede*, pp. 43–4.
69. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 161ff.
70. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p. 163.
71. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p. 164.
72. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p. 164.
73. *On the Relics of Saints*, in *Guibert*, pp. 250–51.
74. *On the Relics of Saints*, p. 205.
75. *On the Relics of Saints*, p. 206.
76. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p. 2.
77. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p. 72.

4

CHECKING UP ON MONKS AND NUNS IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY NORMANDY: ARCHBISHOP EUDES RIGAUD

In March 1248 Eudes Rigaud, a Franciscan friar from a family of the minor nobility, was consecrated the archbishop of Rouen in Normandy, a position he held until his death, around the age of seventy-five, in 1276. As archbishop he was the "chief bishop" or head of the diocese of Rouen and half a dozen other dioceses in the province of Normandy in northern France, overseeing the clergy, holding court, convoking provincial church councils, formally instating abbots and abbesses in their offices, and the like. Among his many responsibilities, and the most important here, was that of making "visitations" of (i.e., inspecting) religious houses within his diocese, a task he took up early in his reign, beginning on July 17, 1248 and ending with his last visit on December 8, 1269. In that twenty-one-year period he traveled, by one estimate, 54,131 miles (for an average per year of 2,517 miles),[1] recording in a book the places he visited and the work he carried out. It is this *Register*, "both a calendar and an archive,"[2] which makes possible a detailed reconstruction of monastic life in thirteenth-century France. The tradition of visitation drew heavily on a reform agenda that had been spearheaded by the papacy since the twelfth century. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran council, the most successful reform council in the Middle Ages, ordered that all bishops should conduct regular visitations of monastic houses in their dioceses, and these statutes were updated and reissued by Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241). As we will see, for many reasons and principally because there were so many monasteries and not enough manpower to conduct regular visitations, local practice flourished.



Places in Normandy visited by Archbishop Eudes Rigaud (1248–1269). (University of Connecticut Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center [MAGIC])

HOW TO MAKE A VISITATION

Procedure for a visitation was extremely labor-intensive but straightforward. First, the community would be notified by letter beforehand of the day of the visitor's arrival—this was done especially to make sure that the head of the house would be present and thus able to answer for his or her charge. Arriving with his entourage, that is, clergy, scribes, and servants (perhaps as many as twenty men in Eudes's retinue),[3] the visitor was formally received by the entire community, preached a sermon in the chapter house, and then addressed a series of standard questions to the community, such as: Was the Rule being observed? Was the Divine Office properly said? Were there any recent serious disturbances or infractions? On occasion the precise questions and the order in which they were asked are given in the *Register*, as at Sacey, a small priory (dependent cell) of the abbey of Marmoutier, Saint Martin's own foundation, which Eudes visited in July 1250.[4] There were three monks there.

> We made a visitation. Asked whether they lived in common, they replied, "Yes." Asked whether they clothed themselves from the common resources of the house, they said, "Yes." Asked whether they handed in their old clothes when they received new ones,

> they replied, "Yes," or that otherwise they got none. Asked whether they were all priests, they said, "Yes." Asked whether they all celebrated their Masses, they replied that there was one old man who because of his bodily infirmity does not celebrate. Asked whether they confessed in accordance with the Statutes of Pope Gregory [i.e., once a month], and likewise as to the statutory recommendations concerning Communion [i.e., receiving it on the first Sunday of each month], they replied in the affirmative. Asked in what manner they slept, they replied that they slept on feather beds; we forbade the use of these save in cases of necessity and when the Rule permitted. Asked whether they ate meat, they replied that they did; we forbade the eating of meat, save as the Rule permitted. They have an income of about two hundred pounds; they owe nothing, since much more is owed to them than they owe.

After this public and collective questioning, if the visitor thought it necessary to gain more or more accurate information, he would meet with each member of the community privately to receive his or her independent testimony; then inspect the grounds, the church fabric, and the accounts of the house (if available). Whatever corrections needed to be made were pronounced on the spot, and after he left the visitor often sent a follow-up letter restating the findings and orders that resulted from his visit. During his travels, the visitor was owed hospitality, or "procuration" by the house, either in kind (stabling and fodder for the horses, accommodation for servants) or in money. Such an outlay of money and goods could be extremely burdensome, and it is not surprising that this was a source of much dispute; indeed, not every house acknowledged Eudes's right to visit: when he and his entourage arrived at the priory of Saint-Germain-sur-Ay in 1266, the monks refused them entrance. Eudes and company were forced to spend the night in town but the next day they "went again to the door" of the priory to tell the monks they had to pay their procuration or lodging expenses. How this turned out we do not know.

THE *REGISTER*

Visitation records are mostly negative evidence, but not entirely; and even from negative evidence we can reconstruct normal or prevailing conditions. What we have in Eudes's massive Latin *Register* (numbering over 700 pages in an incomplete English translation) is a private memorandum book or journal which records where he went, when, what he found, and what he ordered—over a period of twenty-one years! Other visitation documents survive for other parts of Europe (we will see some for an English nunnery in the next chapter),

but few collections are as detailed and continuous as Eudes's *Register*, the "fullest and most informative account of actual religious conditions in a given geographical area that the Middle Ages have bequeathed to posterity."[5] Many of his injunctions occur so often as to be almost routine: more frequent inspection of coffers to guard against the possession of personal property; more frequent public readings of Saint Benedict's *Rule* and the Statutes of Gregory IX; more strict observance of the fasts of the *Rule* and the prohibition against meat-eating; and so on. The *Register* is also one of our best witnesses to the whole system of episcopal visitation which was, in the high Middle Ages, "generally regarded as the best, if not the only, method of monastic reform."[6]

Manuscript illumination of a monk harvesting wheat, twelfth century. (Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis)

The value of this unique body of documentation is considerable. First, there is simply the human interest element, for the *Register* is loaded with snapshots of real medieval people. The world that these people inhabit is so different from ours, so alien in many respects, and yet as human beings they are completely recognizable, indeed familiar in their idiosyncrasies, their strengths and weaknesses, even across an expanse of nearly eight centuries. In 1256 at Saint-Etienne-de-Caen, Eudes found the monks had rabbit dogs at one of the priories, and

forbade them "becom[ing] hunters." (At Briouze in 1260 it was Oliver, the prior's associate, who went out hunting partridges "with net and falcon" and even had a cage for the falcons on the conventual grounds.) In 1265 at the priory of Saint-Pierre-de-Pontoise, the head of the house is reported to have been "ranting" about having to pay taxes for a crusade. Two monks under house arrest at Sainte-Catherine in 1250 apparently rebelled against their confinement by singing obscene songs in loud voices. At the Abbey of Saint-Victor (1261) quarrels had arisen about getting better wine and food; Eudes told the monks not to "grumble about this," urged them to "live in charity with one another so far as they could do so," and ordered the abbot to get better beer. Visiting at the abbey of Saint-Martin-de-Pontoise in 1257, Eudes notes that the monks there "have a certain chamber called 'Bernard's Room,' in which they drink almost as much as they do in the refectory." At the nunnery of Saint-Saëns in 1253, Eudes notes that one of the nuns was assisting the priest at mass (women serving at the altar was a practice the Catholic Church did not officially allow until 1994). In previous chapters we have seen the importance of monastic rules and collections of customs as evidence, but the *Register* is something different: it preserves a mass of detail about the regular, mundane interactions of real individuals in real communities in a known place and time, telling us not merely what someone thought monks and nuns should do, but what they actually did.

In short, the *Register* allows us to go below the layer of rule and statute to penetrate to deeper realities of everyday monastic life, both in the community and in its relations with the world outside its walls. Indeed, Eudes himself was another channel through which the world flowed into the monastery—an educated, well-traveled diplomat, friend of King Louis IX and a member of his council, an envoy in the international peace negotiations between the kings of England and France, an organizer of the Crusade of 1270, and much more. Probably most men of his stature would have "found little or no time for the petty work of inspecting obscure priories where lived but two or three obscure monks," would have avoided, in short, the "prosaic and thankless duties of a visitant."[7] But he did not: in short, Eudes Rigaud was conscientious, apparently indefatigable, long-lived, kept a *Register*—and his *Register* has come down to us.

WHOM DID EUDES VISIT?

Eudes officially visited 192 different abbeys and priories within the seven dioceses of his province, for a total of 1,019 separate visitations and an average of five visits to each community.[8] Most of these houses were visited more than once, like the nunnery Notre Dame

d'Almenèches, visited three times (1250, 1255, and 1260), and the monastery of Saint Wandrille, visited sixteen times between 1249 and 1269. Eudes also checked in on other religious institutions, such as cathedral churches, parish churches, hospitals, and leper houses. Many of these were communities that also adopted a life in common, where clergy (and in some cases lay brothers and sisters) lived a quasi-monastic life, forming what has been described by one historian as a "hybrid order of clerical monks."[9] Such a variety of forms, the natural product of centuries of monastic development in the West, is clearly exemplified in the *Register*. Within this broad spectrum of monastic and quasi-monastic institutions, some were more open to worldly influence than others: residents in a collegiate church (a church served by a community of clergy) lived "in the world" more than monks and nuns. But such openness to the outside is a matter of degree: in Chapter Two we saw how permeable was the boundary between the monastery and the world "outside" at Cluny. The exceptional evidence that we have for religious life in thirteenth-century Normandy, one of the richest and most powerful principalities in Western Europe, gives us a view of many kinds of institutions that, in different ways, followed monastic practice. That variety of form, and the ease with which monastic boundaries were crossed, help explain why the monastery was such a completely normal, even ordinary feature in the medieval landscape.

EUDES'S METHODS

The *Register* is an excellent source for studying thirteenth-century "best practice" methods of episcopal visitation, especially in their most humane form. Eudes was a true student of the golden mean so obvious in the *Rule of St Benedict.* The discipline he meted out tended to be "medicinal" rather than "punitive," that is, it sought to encourage correction rather than to punish. Medicinal discipline included assigning penance (usually fasting), giving formal warnings, exacting promises to improve conduct, and admonition (public and private), in contrast with punitive measures such as excommunication, money fines, seizure of goods or income, confinement within the monastery, and expulsion from the community. By a ratio of about 3:1, Eudes relied more heavily on medicinal discipline, for a variety of reasons, as we will see.

A successful visitation obviously must begin with getting accurate information. Eudes's ideas about accuracy seem to require that he hear from everyone. At Noyon-sur-Andelle (1264) the prior was absent (he was overseeing the grape harvest near Meulan), and we note Eudes's language that "because of his absence we were not able to learn about the state of the house." At Mont-Deux-Amants (1262)

one brother, named Babot, made numerous allegations, that the prior left the house often, favored his relatives, and gave away the goods of the house, such as horses and cups, without the permission of the chapter. Eudes does not assume that all accusations are true, and in this case dismissed these charges as frivolous (although he did believe the more general complaint that the prior was withholding £20 due to the community for pittances, small sums of money given to the community by "certain of the faithful,"[10] and ordered him to grant them those monies). At a visitation of the collegiate church at Sauqueville (1261), where he heard that the treasurer had been "defamed" many times over of Albereda of Caney (i.e., he had been denounced to his superiors for having sexual relations with her), Eudes does not record this as a fact; indeed, he notes that the accused appeared before him a week later and denied these rumors, and Eudes ordered an inquiry into the matter. (An entry like this reminds us that much of what is recorded in the *Register* is accusation, not charges that are known to be true, an important point to keep in mind when reading visitation records.) Thus, in a 1254 visitation to the community of canons at the cathedral church of Lisieux, allegations were made against five or six of the priests for "incontinence" (unchastity) and Eudes asks the community to make a "diligent investigation" themselves, and to correct them if true: "For, since we did not have full proof of these things, we were unwilling to go ahead and discipline the aforesaid abuses."

In many of the visits it is reported in the *Register* that the monks or nuns "do not accuse each other in chapter." For example, in 1248 at Mont-Sainte-Catherine, Eudes found that "some are not willing to accuse their brethren when they break the rule of silence; we enjoined and ordered each to accuse the other without exception." He is referring to that portion of the daily chapter meeting when, after the reading of the *Rule*, the abbot would ask anyone who had a fault to confess to do so. The monk with a confession to make would come forward, prostrate himself upon the floor, and declare his fault (*mea culpa*).[11] This practice can be traced to Chapter 46 of Benedict's *Rule:* if someone commits a fault while at work or failing "in any other way … he must at once come before the abbot and community and of his own accord admit his fault and make satisfaction." At this time one could also accuse someone else of a fault or violation of the Rule (such as breaking the rule of silence referred to above). Such accusations were to be based on what one had seen or heard and believed to be true; suspicion was not grounds for an accusation.[12] "Making satisfaction" meant undergoing some type of punishment, such as fasting, going without wine, or receiving the "discipline" (as noted earlier, a flogging with a small whip made of a bunch of knotted strips

of leather; we recall the communal whip at Nitria, one of the earliest Egyptian monasteries, founded in the 330s). At a visitation of Valmont (1257), where there are twenty-seven monks and they "do not accuse each other in chapter," Eudes addresses the problem by ordering that "he who does not accuse his companion of an offense shall incur the same penalty as the perpetrator would merit." Similarly, at Le Tréport (1257), Eudes "enjoined them to correct this under this penalty, that he who shall see a companion offend and not accuse him shall fast or abstain from wine that day." At Saint-Evroult (1258), where there are thirty-one monks, they do not accuse each other "except in the matter of silence"—so they do accuse one another, only they do so selectively! Another variation is found at Envermeu (1261), where one did not accuse another because it was not their "Usage" to do so. "However, the prior, subprior, and the other officers accused the delinquents, and then the delinquent was publicly disciplined." At Sainte-Trinité-de-Caen (1250), where there are sixty-five nuns, there is a tradition that might have been more agreeable to the senior nuns than to the juniors: they do not accuse each other "except those who are specially deputed to accuse the younger ones." At Mont-Sainte-Catherine, a monastery where in 1254 there are twenty-six monks, the system does not work at all because the abbot was "such a wrathful and bitter man that when he presides in chapter no one dares accuse another because of his severity." It is not hard to think of all the reasons why "accusing each other" might be a challenging rule to follow in monastic life, where one lived in close quarters with the same people for many years, especially since what Eudes has in mind, as he states at Bourg-Achard in 1257, is "frequent and mutual accusation."

A QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE

There were other obstacles to Eudes's getting the information he wanted during a visitation. Like most institutions, monasteries wanted to protect their customary independence, their financial and other resources, and to avoid establishing any undesirable precedents—in short, they wanted to be free from meddling! On May 22, 1256, Thomas and Martin, the heads of two small priories (Sainte-Hélène and Saint-Germain-en-Hague, respectively), met with Eudes before his announced visit—cutting him off at the pass, so to speak—to tell him that they were not obliged to receive him for visitation, or to provide procuration for him, because they had never been visited by the archbishop of Rouen or by the bishop of Coutances (the diocese where these priories were located), nor given them procuration. In fact, Prior Thomas related the story of how he was once asked by a former bishop for accommodation at his (Thomas's) house, and even though

the bishop explained he would pay his own way Thomas had refused. When asked why, he replied he had done so in order that "the bishop might not be able to say in the future that the priory had at one time received a bishop for visitation and procuration." (Apparently people believed the proverb, well-known in the Middle Ages, that twice makes a custom!) Eudes accepted their explanation for the time being (they swore an oath on their word as priests) and did not make a visit, but he did tell them he would make an inquiry into the truth of their claims—and recorded this in his *Register* to remind himself to do so (and since there is no record in the *Register* that he ever visited them, Thomas and Martin must have been telling the truth!). The very next day, on May 23, at the tiny priory of Héauville where there were two monks, Eudes heard more of the same: this was a priory, like Sacey, belonging to the monastery of Marmoutier in Tours, which had claimed exemption from episcopal visitation for itself and all its dependencies since the tenth century (Marmoutier had more priories in France than any other monastery: over 100 by the year 1200). "Because they were exempt," writes Eudes "they did not wish to answer any questions about themselves or concerning the state of the house."

On other occasions, however, we get the distinct sense, thanks to the marvelous detail and on-the-ground reportage of the *Register*, that Eudes's visit was welcome. At Saint-Saëns (1265), Eudes was clearly troubled to find the nuns "living in disorder and not according to the Rule." They did not confess frequently, they did not eat together but ate in separate groups (forming cliques, we would say), they had private property, and they did not have enough wheat or oats to last until harvest (this was in July, and the harvest will not even begin until early August).

> Since we saw them to be in bad state, especially in the matter of certain observances of the Rule, we earnestly and eagerly sought for ways by which their state might be decently and wholesomely improved, and that they might be better attuned to God and to their own Rule. However, we did not do anything about this at this time. But on the following morning we went to them again, and all, gathered together in chapter before us, submitted themselves entirely to our will and ordinance and promised in good faith that they would more zealously observe whatever, with God's aid, we should be led to ordain for them.

Eudes had his clerk record all these proceedings in a letter which was then sealed with the seals of the prioress and other clergy present. We can see that the man who acted as negotiator for a peace treaty between Louis IX of France and Henry III of England honed his

diplomatic skills in monastic chapter houses!

THE PRIORY OF SAINT-PIERRE-DE-PONTOISE

Let us briefly tour a few representative communities, beginning with Saint-Pierre-de-Pontoise, a house Eudes regularly visited and one that exemplifies a common type of monastic house found in this period. Saint-Pierre's was a priory of the Abbey of Bec, meaning that it was a dependent or satellite of that monastery. A priory, headed by a prior or prioress, was often situated on lands belonging to the "mother-house" (especially those that might be some distance away, as we saw at Cluny), and functioned as an outpost or "branch" of the main house, representing its interests there, overseeing the estate, and collecting its revenues. According to canon law, a priory had to have at least two monks, and as a monastic house it was supposed to celebrate the Divine Office, though its small size often made this difficult. In addition, if the priory had its own church, it might be used as the parish church by the local laity, an arrangement often seen in Eudes's archdiocese. When Eudes visited Saint-Pierre's for the first time in 1250, there were four monks resident (the number fluctuated between four and six for the next twenty years). Eudes found that the monks sometimes eat meat, and the prior "rides about with the steward," meaning he is out and about more than he should be. (The steward referred to would be one of a number of such officials who worked for the Abbey of Bec and managed its properties.) Further, the prior does not keep accounts properly. In 1253, Eudes reports that the house is in good condition. In 1254 some of the usual problems are noted, for example, they do not read the Rule, and they do not have a copy of Gregory IX's statutes. The monks' church on the priory grounds is also the parish church for some of the people of the town of Pontoise, indeed the priory maintains a priest for the service of that church. At this visit Eudes learns that the priest of Saint-Pierre "quarrels with his parishioners … [and] … sings his Vespers while the monks are chanting theirs, so that one disturbs the other … [and] if any of his parishioners says anything to him, he takes off his vestments and stops celebrating Mass." In 1259, among other things, the monks "complained greatly because women entered their choir and chancel and disturbed their prayers." The women in question are surely parishioners of the church. In 1262, it is noted that there should be six monks but there are only four because they have debts; this means that two of the six were recalled to Bec, the mother-house, to cut down on expenses at the priory. Further, it is stated that the monks owe £73 to the abbot, and that they have given him the manor of Fontenay for him to receive its income until he should recover his debt. This refers to the standard arrangement whereby the monks of a

priory, here, Saint-Pierre, receive income from the lands connected to that priory, of which they send a certain amount to Bec. The £73 in question is what they still owe at this time, and to discharge that debt they are temporarily allowing the abbot to draw the income from some of the lands that normally support Saint-Pierre. Alms are given three times a week; other things are "in good condition." At the next recorded visit, in 1263, the priest there (probably the same temperamental priest of 1254) complained to Eudes and his visitation team, in the presence of the prior, about the "incompetent and unworthy clerk whom the prior had sent to him," and Eudes ordered the prior to correct this. In 1264, there were five monks; the prior was ordered to inspect their coffers (private chests or boxes) more frequently; they still owed the abbot and some others about £40; and Eudes makes a note to himself to talk with the abbot of Bec about the tithe which he exacted from this priory (evidently concerned about the financial burden it places on the house). In 1265 two of the five monks were absent, including the prior, which Eudes was "much displeased" about because as head the prior had, of course, received notice about the upcoming visitation and should have been there. Also the great hall "in which we were accustomed to visit them" was not clean, and the monks informed Eudes that the prior had been "ranting" about having to pay taxes to the papacy (for a crusade to be launched by King Louis IX), which also "displeased" Eudes, who told the monks to "tell the prior for us" that he should stop this behavior. He goes on to say that because of the prior's absence "we could not procure complete information concerning the state [i.e., the finances] of the house," but the three monks who *were* there said that they thought the community owed little or nothing. In 1268 their numbers were smaller because the Abbot of Bec had again recalled some monks; everything was "in good condition," and that same day, after the visitation, Eudes confirmed some of the local children in Saint-Pierre's church at the priory, then spent the night "at our [i.e., the archbishop's] manor" in the town of Pontoise. Years later, on December 8, 1269, the day when Eudes made the last visits of his twenty-one-year visitation career, one of these was to Saint-Pierre, where he learned that they still owed £20 but £20 was owed to them and everything else was "in good condition."

MONTIVILLIERS

Montivilliers was a large and ancient (560 years old) Benedictine community that housed about sixty nuns. In 1260, after considerable debate about whether or not the archbishop of Rouen had the right to "visit" the abbey of Montivilliers (during which papal decrees going back some sixty years to the pontificate of Innocent III were

consulted), Eudes finally carried out a visitation. Not surprisingly, he left a fuller record than usual, including his order (which was given before every visitation but is not typically included in the *Register*) that the nuns were to reply truthfully to whatever questions they should be asked. Eudes inquired into the saying of the Hours, ruled that they should receive Communion once a month, and that the abbess should make frequent inspection of the nuns' coffers. The nuns revealed that at the feasts of Saint John, Saint Stephen, and the Holy Innocents they had sung scurrilous songs. He also learned that fewer alms were being given out because the nuns gave to the maidservants and others the remnants of their food portions (bread, wine, cooked food) that should be given away as alms. Alms were given three times a week, and the abbess was obliged by a tradition of the house established by one of her predecessors, to feed thirteen poor people every day (perhaps the nuns' leftover food was intended for this daily charity). All healthy persons were ordered to eat together and not in small groups, take their seats at table at random, and eat the same food. The abbess was to attend chapter more often, adhere to the common life, and be more affable toward the friends of the nuns (presumably when they visited). The cantress also was to get a copy of the service book she needed to lead prayers. Two years later, at the 1262 visit, the nuns said they had entirely abandoned the farces they used to act at the feast of the Innocents; and once a year a full report of the finances of the house is made to the community. The abbess still rarely mixes with the community or comes to chapter or the refectory, and delays in handing out new clothes, head covers, and other "needful" things. She is ordered to see that the sick are better cared for, and to repair the infirmary and provide a physician for the community. In 1263, after hearing complaints about the austerity of the abbess, Eudes ordered her to "appoint one or two to take care of the little needs of the nuns, such as ginger, or some such thing, and with whom the others might talk a little more freely and familiarly." In 1265 there was a repeat of much that had been noted in earlier visits—also, a glossed psalter that had been bequeathed to them by Sir Arnoul of Jocres had been loaned out without the knowledge of the community (the abbess intimated that she would be able to get it back because she knew where it was—Master William of Beaumont had it). Eudes also notes that before leaving he called the abbess, the prioress, and the subprioress before him and his retinue in the major chapel of the abbess next to the hall (in other words, not in public before the entire community) and laid out a number of specific orders, among them that nuns were not to be allowed to stand godmother for any person, that the nuns' pet birds should be removed, that ornaments or decorations ("made of peach-colored cloth or such things") were not

to be put on collars or cuffs, nor were they to wear metaled belts or use knives with fancy handles (in short, no luxury items). He also ordered the abbess not to cause Philippa of Monchy any trouble, or to be angry with her for what she had said in chapter (what she said and whether it was at the time of this visit or some other time is not clear).

LEPROSARIES (LEPER HOUSE OR COLONY) AND HOSPITALS

By Eudes's day there were thousands of leper hospitals across Europe (about 200 are known in Britain by the fourteenth century), ranging in size from "substantial ecclesiastical foundations" to "poor hovels without staff or chapel."[13] Leprosy (Hansen's disease) is a progressive, chronic, and infectious bacterial disease.[14] Its symptoms range from a "disfiguring skin disease to a mutilating disease of hands and feet."[15] Although in the popular mind it tends to be associated with the Middle Ages in particular, leprosy was known in the ancient world, and was present in Europe in the late Roman period: the skeleton of a leper has been excavated in England, dating to the fourth or fifth century. Regulations governing lepers appear in law codes beginning in the eighth century. Leprosy was fairly widespread but not necessarily common, from the twelfth century on, and while it mostly disappeared in the sixteenth century, it did survive in parts of northern Europe, especially Scandinavia, down to the twentieth century.[16]

A ward in the Hôtel-Dieu, Paris, sixteenth century. (Lacroix, Paul. *Science and*

Literature in the Middle Ages …, 1878)

There were a number of parallels between leper houses and monasteries. Leprosaries and hospitals were often organized along monastic or semimonastic lines: the men and women who were sick formed a community, as did the healthy men and women who cared for them. These unique religious communities were often headed by a master general of the community who was himself a leper. The healthy men and women who served the lepers lived as a community under a prior and prioress, respectively, and often followed the Rule of Saint Augustine: vowing to lead a common life, and following the rules of chastity and obedience. People also endowed leper houses for some of the same reasons that they endowed monasteries: in return for prayers, in this case the prayers of men and women suffering an involuntary and disfiguring affliction. Indeed, just as a person was said to "die to the world" when he or she entered a monastery, so the leper was seen as dying to the world when he or she entered a leper house. That this correspondence existed in the minds of medieval people is apparent in the ritual for the "seclusion" of a leper: after the celebration of a funeral mass which the sick man or woman was to hear while kneeling beneath a black canopy before the altar, "after the manner of a dead man," the priest with a spade would cast earth on each of the leper's feet, saying "Be dead to the world, but live again with God."[17] (It is worth noting, then, that the ostracism that those suffering from leprosy have experienced the world over and throughout history often took the form, in the Middle Ages, of segregating and supporting them in leper hospitals or colonies—and asking for their prayers.)

The *Register* preserves the names of about a dozen different leper establishments in Eudes's province, which he visited as archbishop, just as he did monasteries.[18] Some of these are clearly run according to a monastic regime, like La Salle-aux-Puelles, a leprosary for women first visited by Eudes in 1248. It was staffed with nuns (who do not hold chapter twice weekly as ordered and talk too much in the refectory), and we know that there are cloisters, kitchens, and workrooms here, since Eudes notes disapprovingly that lay folk constantly enter them and mingle with the sisters. A proctor and a priest reside there with six leprous sisters (one of whom was found to be healthy and Eudes ordered in a 1265 visit that she be sent "home to her father"), the sisters attend Matins, keep silence after Compline, have a fixed allotment of food and drink, make a general distribution of alms three times a week, and give the leftover food from their meals to a "certain leprous woman at Moulineaux." Other houses seem more heterogeneous, such as Mont-aux-Malades (1254), a leprosary (today, a parish within the city of Rouen) headed by a prior, which

contained what Eudes himself calls “four communities”: seventeen male lepers, fifteen female lepers, ten canons or priests to serve them, and a number of monks. At Longueville in 1249, Eudes dedicated a “leper chapel” to the honor of the Blessed Mary Magdalene, like any other church, and a leper hospital (which would have contained a church) at Arques in 1257. At Bellencombre, another leprosary, Eudes notes in 1255 that there were four canons, five male lepers, one female leper, two lay sisters, four monks, and one porter for the gate. This group led a life in common and was to follow the usual practice, holding chapter once a week with all the brothers present. In a 1264 visit Eudes urged the prior to “do his best to encourage and exhort the lepers to bear their sufferings.” After Compline the canons grumbled in the dormitory against the orders of the prior and broke the rule of silence by talking to each other. The house had received £100 of a total of £120 that had been given to them by King Louis to repair and reroof their buildings. The lepers were present at the visitation, and presumably the sermon that preceded it, along with the rest of the community, as indicated by the comment that when Eudes ordered Brother William to render an account of those £100, he did so in the presence “of all,” which he specified as including the “prior, the canons, and the lepers.” Eudes ordered the prior to reroof and repair the buildings where the lepers lived and to be “more solicitous and considerate than he had been in providing them with the necessities of life.” Just as he did in many other communities, he also ordered that the lepers were to confess to the prior more often.

We see Eudes compelled to act as a public medical officer during regular visitation, as at the abbey of Le Tréport in 1268, where he learned that Brother Richard, a former prior, was “considered suspect of leprosy” and ordered him to “undergo an examination in the presence of some monks sent with him” (i.e., he was evidently sent elsewhere for the examination). The same year, at the abbey of Bec-Hellouin where there were sixty-four monks, Eudes discovered that the community suspected Brother Nicholas of leprosy, and “abhorred and abominated him because of this.” Eudes advised the abbot privately to send the monk away.

We see Eudes following the regular progression of visitation at hospitals, which were usually dedicated to serving those who were sick and impoverished. At Mont-Deux-Amants (1259) silence was badly observed, the canons’ clothing was shabby, the sick were not well cared for, and an argument broke out in Eudes’s presence because a few of the brothers claimed that in times of convalescence some were better provided with food than others. The sources of income should be “written out again in a clearer manner” and that document kept in a public place. Eudes’s general diagnosis is that all in all, “very

few things were done in charity among them." Brother Peter, a canon at the priory of Saint-Mary-Magdalene at Rouen (1261), was "insensate, drunken, and garrulous, and was at times unwilling to celebrate Mass when requested by the prior.… He was disobedient and rebellious, and would walk out of the house in an unseemly manner, with head erect and neck outstretched" (a rare description of body language). Eudes ordered the prior to send Brother Peter to him for punishment if he did not change his behavior (a measure that Eudes rarely employed). An atmosphere of disorder and confused identity hangs over the community at the Hôtel-Dieu at Pontoise when Eudes visits there in 1264, perhaps because the lay brothers do not observe any Rule, and though the sisters observed the Rule of Saint Augustine, he notes that they do not have a copy of the Rule (although the prioress said she was having it written out and "thought that she would have it ready quite soon"). In 1266 it is noted that a secular priest appointed by the king is rector and master of the house, although he is required to confer with the prioress concerning the administration of its finances. The two priests who are there are "dressed as regulars" (i.e., as monks) but they still "had not yet made profession of a Rule, nor did they know what Rule to follow." With the consent of the fourteen sisters and the prioress, Eudes also advises them on what sort of habit to wear (a white tunic under their surplices, and a black cape over them). The sisters "should conduct themselves according to the Rule of Saint Augustine, and they have taken the three vows."

GOURNAY

Thirty miles east of Rouen lies Gournay, a town which, like most medieval towns, housed a number of different religious and quasi-religious communities which Eudes had the right and responsibility to "visit," just as he visited monasteries. At Gournay there were the Hôtel-Dieu for the sick poor which was located in the parish of Saint Mary's in the town, a leper hospital, and the collegiate church of Saint-Hildevert. These institutions overlap so much in personnel, mission, and character with monasteries that we might envision them all as points on a continuum of establishments inspired by the monastic regime; but none of them is a monastery, strictly speaking, and their sense of community seems to be less well-developed.

At the Hôtel-Dieu there is, in 1257, a chaplain along with six lay brothers and six sisters, who are admitted to the hospital to live and work there with the consent of both local religious and secular authorities, that is, the chapter of clergy at the church of Saint-Hildevert and of the burgesses of the town of Gournay. As we have seen, the lay servants in hospitals and leprosaries often took revocable

(i.e., temporary) monastic vows, and here at the hospital the brothers, sisters, and priest do eat in common, but otherwise the sense of community is weak: they do not observe any Rule, they do not discipline each other, they do not sleep in the same place, some of the brothers have wives who sleep there with them, and they confess whenever and to whomever they please. Eudes notes that the sick are ill provided for, and that one of the sisters has been pilfering the goods of the house. For his visit the following year Eudes summoned the brothers of the Hôtel-Dieu to the church of Saint-Hildevert (only the chaplain and three of the brothers showed up). In 1259 he was distressed to learn that "when the brothers of the [Hôtel-Dieu], but who live outside it, came to Gournay, they did not wish to sleep at the hospital, but spent the night in the houses of the burgesses; we ordered the dean [of Saint-Hildevert] to compel them to spend the night at the hospital whenever they come to Gournay." Again in 1261 Eudes found that the "sick poor received little from the goods of the house" but that the house "had admitted and received as guests healthy travelers, both priests and clerics, and even the sergeants of the king who watched the forest of Lyons. We forbade them to grant hospitality to men of this kind in the future, unless such men were willing to sleep with the sick." He also ordered the chaplain of the hospital to "come to a satisfactory agreement" with the priest of Saint Mary's parish regarding the cure of souls (i.e., the right to administer the sacraments) for those living in the house. In 1264 he still found that the sick and poor were "ill provided for" and that the lay brothers and lay sisters had "spent almost everything." In his 1267 visit he found the house "in good condition."

In 1257 Eudes describes the arrangement at the leper hospital as "unsatisfactory: the dean of Gournay and certain burgesses are the proctors of the house and of the master; a certain leprous cleric is lessee," that is, this cleric receives the income and manages the place. In 1261 Eudes had the leper house at Gournay visited by his almoner and another cleric the day before (while Eudes himself was at the hospital and Saint-Hildevert's) and notes that they had found the place "miserably desolate, that is to say, overburdened with debts and with people, and without provisions to last out the year. They found also that their chaplain had recently died." In 1264 he talked with the masters and proctors of the local leper houses, and learned that they had few provisions to last out the year. In 1268 when he made inquiries at the Hôtel-Dieu concerning the state of the local leper house from the dean, the canons, and the provost manager, he learned there was one leper resident and noted that the house was in "sufficiently good condition."

Eudes describes the 1263 visit to the chapter at Saint-Hildevert in

rather unusual terms, stating that he "came in person on pilgrimage" to the church there, "heard Mass and kissed the relics"—possibly in thanksgiving for recovering his health: he had been so afflicted with stomach and head pains (migraines?) the day before that he had had to send his "dearest brother" Adam Rigaud, who was also a cleric and a member of his entourage, to conduct a visitation for him. During this visit to Saint-Hildevert, Eudes learned that the Divine Office was carried out badly, and that on feast days (especially that of Saint Nicholas) members of the community had acted in a "dissolute and scurrilous manner, dancing through the town and singing," that one of the canons had "kept a certain woman" for fourteen years secretly in his house, and that the chaplain, who was reported to have beaten a woman who would not "turn over her daughter to him," had finally "taken the girl by force." Things were so bad that Eudes was back for a visit on October 1 of that same year (1263), where he met with some of the offenders and enjoined suitable penances for their delinquencies. He also issued a general prohibition against dancing on feast days. One year later, in October 1264 he found the church "in a sufficiently good condition." (He also ordered them to pass some statutes in their chapter about celebrating the Divine Office properly.) On September 8, 1267, Eudes celebrated Mass in the parish church of Saint Mary's in Gournay and preached in the churchyard there. He spent that night in town and the next day visited the chapter where he found the dean, the treasurer, and one canon resident, and heard allegations about the community that highlight its worldly contacts: the sacristan's helper and the younger brother of the treasurer were defamed "as it was said" of "despoiling the Jews [reneging on debts perhaps], of assaulting the townsmen at night, and of fishing in the king's fish pond." Eudes ordered the chapter to discipline and punish them for these actions. Evidently the chapter did not celebrate a daily conventual Mass, as Eudes orders them to do so in his 1268 visit.

The sharing of personnel, mission, and character within this network of communities in the town of Gournay is a local arrangement inspired to a considerable degree by the model of the monastery, and Eudes's work here indicates that the notion of a continuum of communities is part of his understanding as well. In an effort to improve conditions at the hospital and the leper house, he recommends a consolidation of their management with the collegiate church and the town: in 1266 he asked the dean and treasurer of the chapter of Saint-Hildevert to discuss in their general chapter and appoint one of their canons as proctor or agent for the Hôtel-Dieu and the leper house. That agent would then, in the company of another canon and a citizen of the town of Gournay elected for this purpose, visit these houses during the year. Henceforth a proctor from Saint-

Hildevert was to be appointed for this task every year. Also, during his last (recorded) visit to Gournay (1268), he visited the chapter at Saint-Hildevert and ordered the members of that community to have a conference among themselves concerning the parochial rights of the priest of Saint Mary, who had claims over the Hôtel-Dieu. We see here the monastery providing the pattern for other social institutions: a church devoted to serving the laity where the priests live like monks; "health care facilities" where laypersons, the sick and their caretakers, take quasi-monastic vows, answer to a superior, and live a common life. The institution that provides the model for organization, management, and the daily schedule is the monastery—and Eudes visits them all.

Let us turn from specific houses to look at what Eudes saw firsthand of daily life in the monasteries and quasi-monastic communities of later thirteenth-century Normandy, in terms of leadership, physical structure and financial management, discipline within the monastery, the "world" in the monastery, incontinence, fugitive monks and nuns, and chapter business.

PRIORIES

The economic relationship of a priory to its mother-house is stated clearly in Eudes's entry for Gasny (1268), a priory of Saint-Ouen with three monks, where he notes that they "owed nothing, since they were held to remit to the abbey everything which remained to them beyond their own sustenance and that of their staff." Who gets sent from the mother-house to a priory, how is this decided? One possible hint is preserved in the record of Eudes's 1261 visit to Saint-Saëns, where two nuns staying outside the priory had not been recalled, as he had ordered in 1260. The prioress "gave as her excuse" that one of the two, Mary of Eu, was obstreperous, and "she feared that if [Mary] returned, she would upset the whole community." Eudes certainly seems to think that the monks at Liancourt (1265), a priory of Saint-Père-de-Chartres, are much to blame for the "miserable" condition of the house in both spiritual and temporal matters: they did not perform the Divine Office (because the prior had been excommunicated for not paying tithes toward the king's Crusade), the Rule was not observed, and alms and hospitality were not offered. Fearing that things would get worse, he ordered members of the local clergy to take charge of the grange temporarily (including sequestrating all the wheat stored there), and the next year when he found that things were not any better, Eudes wrote to the abbot of the mother-house and asked that these monks be recalled and others "of more mature and better lives" be sent to take their place.

Monks working in the garden, by Fra Angelico, fifteenth century. (Gianni Dagli Orti/ The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY)

Complaints that monks and nuns at priories have no copy of the Rule or the statutes of Gregory IX, that they do not observe the fasts of the Rule, they eat meat freely, and that the head does not cast accounts with the community, seem to be fairly frequent in the *Register*. Were priories more prone to these problems, given their smaller size and remoteness from the mother-house? Perhaps: we have already mentioned the incident in 1256 when Eudes found rabbit dogs at a priory and thus had to forbid the "monks staying there" from becoming hunters! (Was it easier to hide rabbit dogs at a remote priory than a more frequented, larger house?) It is no surprise that Eudes is always concerned to find one monk dwelling alone, or numbers below their statute level (i.e., the number of residents which it has been determined the place can support). The two monks at Mortemer-sur-Eaulne in 1259 were dwelling "in rancor," not singing the day and night Hours together or even eating together (one of them was taking his meals in the village taverns and in a nearby château): obviously, a disagreement in a house of two monks means that one half of the community is not speaking to the other half. At the priory of Rai there were two monks and one prior and they did not sleep in the same room (as required by the Rule) because the prior's room is too small. Indeed, Eudes and his entourage had to sleep at nearby Saint-Sulpice because there was not enough room and he also remitted almost half the amount of procuration because of the poverty of the

house. Added to these difficulties was the fact that the rules Eudes tries to enforce are not acknowledged as essential by all: at Parnes (1257) Eudes notes that the four monks there "eat meat freely because it has been their custom, but it is not according to the Rule."

ABBOTS AND ABBESSES, PRIORS AND PRIORESSES

It comes as no surprise that much of the content of the *Register* falls under this heading, considering the importance of the abbot and abbess: we recall Benedict's own words that the abbot will have to render a special account of himself to God on the Day of Judgment. Even where a community head was not satisfactory, Eudes clearly values continuity in officeholding as a promoter of good order; indeed, at the monastery of Saint-Ouen (1256) he criticized the abbot because "he changes officials too readily." Frequent changes in leadership would lead to a devaluation of the office, and might be worse than a less-than-perfect abbot. Accordingly, Eudes demonstrates restraint in exercising his power to deprive such people of their offices. In fact, on more than one occasion he refused to allow community heads to step down from office, even when they desperately wanted to: in 1261 the abbot of Jumièges threw himself on the ground before Eudes and begged on hands and knees to be allowed to abdicate, while the community (also all on bended knee) "humbly prayed us to compel him to exercise his office as he had been accustomed to do." (Eudes thought his reasons for wishing to abdicate were "empty and frivolous" and ordered him to retain his office). However, at Valmont in 1262, when the abbot publicly protested that he was feeble and broken in body and begged to be released from his abbatial duties, Eudes "after consultation with our own staff, and likewise considering his age, debility, and failing sight, received his resignation … and caused him to be released from an office which he had exercised in a praiseworthy, faithful, and devoted manner for many years." He gave the community permission to elect a successor, and left behind a member of his staff to break the seal of the former abbot in the chapter and in the presence of the community (a necessary ritual to bring to an official end one abbot's reign and the beginning of another's). Yet six weeks later when Eudes received the report that one Brother Vincent had been chosen to be the new abbot, he quashed the election, not because Vincent was a poor choice but because of a "flaw in the manner of holding the election"—he does not specify what this is—and he then accepted Vincent after all, having considered his worthiness, and the fact that almost all of the monks had voted for him. (One has the sense, here as elsewhere, of Eudes exercising a right just to make sure he still can, a practice in keeping with the necessity, in the Middle Ages, to "use it or lose it" when it

comes to power). There are also officials who do not wait to get permission to leave office: at Saint-Aubin (1268) Eudes punished Anastasia, a former subprioress, for having given up her office against the wish of the prioress—and he deemed two other nuns there disobedient because they had been unwilling to receive that office even though the prioress had commanded them to do so.

Of abbatial derelictions there are, of course, many in the *Register's* 700+ pages: it is the nature of visitation documents to provide such information (and it is worth remembering, as mentioned earlier, that there is a difference between an allegation and an injunction: the first is an assertion without proof, the second is an order given by Eudes to address a problem that he believes truly exists). At Sainte-Catherine (1259), where there are twenty-six monks and four novices, Eudes found that there was no gatekeeper, monks were dwelling alone in two priories, and *all* of the monks "complained greatly that the staff of the monastery, of the abbot, and of the bailiff, came every day through the cloister to the refectory seeking food and drink, and that the monk in charge of the refectory was bound to serve them with portions of meat; because of this there was good reason for grumbling and murmuring. The abbot told us that he could not easily correct this situation." At Eu (1249), the kitchener was "unwilling to perform his duties because the abbot took his horse away from him, though he did offer him another." At La-Trinité-de-Caen (1267), which housed seventy-five nuns, Eudes could not accomplish much because there was no abbess: the community was in the midst of a disputed election, which was being litigated at Rome. One of the premier monasteries of Europe, the wealthy abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel, was in a sorry state in 1256 because the abbot was too severe. He would not allow anyone to go to the infirmary without his permission, and was accused of giving dowries to several of his nieces, maintaining a nephew in school for a long time using abbey funds, and buying a beautiful and expensive book of canon law without the consent of the community (these are the sorts of derelictions only the head of a wealthy house could afford)! He was also accused of striking several priests. Eudes asked that inquiry be made into all these allegations immediately. Other types of abbatial severity were discovered at Sainte-Catherine (1254) where the sick are "wretchedly attended [they only get bread and water], nor is there any one to look out for them; indeed there is not even an infirmary." In addition guests are not well taken care of, the monks are ill-shod and ill-dressed and the abbot compels them to be bled in Advent and then to attend all the hours of the Divine Office without giving them any extra food (usually monks were not bled before major feast days because of the demands of increased liturgical and prayer duty).

The 1263 visit at Saint-Victor-en-Caux is a good example of the variety of problems Eudes could deal with in connection with house leadership. On this occasion the abbot received orders to see to proper audits, repair conventual buildings, provide better food for the monks, make better provision for the sick, behave more courteously to the former (i.e., retired) abbot who still lived there, depose certain officials, reduce his staff, and make an inquiry into charges against a particular monk. At Aumale (1256) Eudes has to remind the abbot that he does not have the authority to give someone permission to skip Compline! At the monastery of Saint-Ouen in 1266, on the basis of reports especially from officials and senior members of the community concerning the harmful behavior of the abbot, Eudes and his colleagues conferred together in order to come up with some plan to improve conditions there: "With the consent of the abbot and the entire community, we decreed that upon some specific day we would convene with ten monks from that monastery whom they should nominate … [to] discuss the matter of reforming their condition, and with their consent we [i.e., Eudes] would issue orders … concerning the whole state of the house, concerning the carelessness or negligence of the abbot, for he seemed to take little heed for the interests of the house." At the priory of Sausseuse (1262) he ordered the prior to "take some of the more discreet canons into his confidence, and to seek their advice more than he was wont to do." The creation of such committees seems at first glance to infringe on the authority of the abbot that was so central to Benedict who, after all, described the abbot as Christ's representative. But the Rule delegates power as well: we recall the balance (described in Chapter One) between the authority of the abbot and the need to appoint officials, establish decanates headed by deans, and to confer with the chapter. In short, we see Eudes working out solutions that preserve the spirit of Benedict's Rule, which envisioned flows of power in the monastery, under abbatial authority.

In his efforts to promote community solidarity and self-correction, Eudes was careful in his dealings with community heads. His decisions to admonish an abbot or abbess either privately or publicly seem to have depended on the atmosphere that reigned in the house. At the abbey of Saint-Wandrille, which Eudes visited in 1267, he publicly exhorted the abbot "to conduct himself charitably toward those who grew fatigued by reason of their labor, to be more sympathetic than he had been … [and] to be more affable with them." In this way the community might have some influence over the abbot by reminding him of Eudes's injunctions. Yet elsewhere, when the community spirit was clearly set against the head, Eudes would have a private session with him, as at Jumièges (1267), a monastery with forty-five monks

which he found to be “in good condition,” except that some monks “had held and were holding bad opinions about the conduct and action of the abbot.” Perhaps Eudes felt that a public exhortation would increase the ill will against the abbot and disrupt an otherwise sound community. For whatever reason, he “privately admonished” the abbot “the next day, in the chamber where we were in the habit of sleeping” in the presence not of any members of the community but only of a few members of his own retinue. Among other things, the abbot was not to sit up late at night with guests “telling jokes and drinking, so that his attendant monks felt they were extremely burdened.” (We recall that even a monk attending on Saint Benedict himself could resent having to hold the lamp and serve the saint while he ate). The reverse measure, that is, admonition of the community in the presence of the head also occurred, as at Bures-en-Bray (1250), a dependent priory of Bec where Eudes lectured the monks concerning fasts, meat-eating, use of feather beds, and more frequent celebration of Mass “in the presence of the abbot of Bec.” Sometimes Eudes opts for the gentle reminder: at Aumale (1259) the abbot was ordered by Eudes to “speak more kindly with his monks, and to be more courteous in disciplining them, as he might well do in true charity.”

Eudes seems to be keenly aware of different “leadership styles.” At the abbey of Saint-Georges (1264) there were twenty-two monks and a kind but slightly muddle-headed abbot, who rarely attended the choir or Matins because, as he put it, “he did not understand the Lessons” (this could mean readings from the Bible or from a collection of saints’ lives)! He did not eat very often in the refectory, saying he was more useful elsewhere, since he “mercifully invited to dine with him in his room some of the weak and those whom he believed to be in need of food and recreation.” He rarely attended chapter, and Eudes ordered him to be present more often and to “administer discipline in the proper manner.” He ends the report, noting that the community “highly commended the goodness and solicitude of the abbot.” He has no patience, however, for absenteeism of the sort displayed by the prior at Le Tréport (1255) who does not stay in the cloister, rides abroad a lot (“on the baldest of excuses”), and skips Compline; nor for those who diminish their own authority by bad behavior, such as the prioress at Neufchâtel (1253) who does not “dare to discipline the others inasmuch as she is as much an offender herself.”

False accusations also occur, of course. At Eu (1266), Eudes “listened with diligent attention and deliberation” to complaints that were made against the abbot. “We discovered and recognized that [the complaints] obviously sprang from rancor and hatred, and were born of malevolence; we therefore adjudged them trifling.” But he was

uneasy about the situation there and returned the following morning to issue a number of orders, among them that resources that had been "donated and willed to the church by the faithful" should be used especially to treat the community to extra food and drink on feast days. He closes the report of this visit with obvious relief: "And so, after many wranglings over the charges which had been made against the abbot, we departed."

At Bondeville we see perhaps evidence of a strong-willed community dominating the head. In 1257 Eudes accepted the resignation of the prioress, Marie (described in the 1255 visit as "quarrelsome and of an evil tongue" who was "scorned by the sisters"), and after "hearing the votes of all the nuns who wished to have a voice" he appointed the person whom most of them had agreed upon, a sister named Comtesse. Two years later, in 1259, Comtesse was sentenced to "receive one discipline in chapter in the presence of the community" (i.e., a stroke with a whip), a measure that Eudes very rarely orders, because she had "yielded to the clamor of the nuns" and given them the seal of the convent—the seal was an official legal instrument that was used to authenticate documents, and was the head's particular responsibility (we recall that breaking the seal of the former abbot upon election of a new one was a necessary ritual in the transmission of power). In 1261, Eudes ordered the prioress to attend chapter, the refectory, and the choir better than she had been wont to do; and he forbade her "to continue her practice of standing out in the churchyard or out of doors after Compline, or to carry on conversations there." (We can envision small groups of nuns, gathered here and there, talking easily together as twilight falls…). In fact the prioress offered Eudes her seal and requested that she be released from her office (which Eudes did not do—instead he urged her to fulfill her duties with more zeal). In 1264 Comtesse, now described as having long held the office of prioress (for seven years, to be exact), was "feeble" although she was still "worthily acquitting herself of this position and had done so for many years." Eudes wished to make provision for her comfort, removed her from office, and gave the community permission to elect another in her place.

NOVICES

It is difficult to get direct evidence of the experience of novices in monasteries. From rules and custumals we get a sense of the regulations regarding their daily schedule, dress, training, and the like, but what was it like for these teenagers and young adults in the community: what did they experience? Bearing in mind that our sources are biased in favor of "negative" evidence, we find in the *Register* some vivid details, as for example at Liancourt in 1254, where

one of the servants (who was also related to the prior) brought a woman into the dormitory when the prior was absent and "had relations" with her when a novice was present, sleeping in the same room. At Aumale (1264), Eudes forbade the mothers of the novices (thirteenth-century helicopter parents, perhaps?) to be allowed to eat anywhere in the abbey except in the great common hall. At Bourg-Achard (1260) there were seven novices who, the prior informs Eudes, were disobedient, insolent, and incorrigible. Eudes warned them to reform their conduct or the prior would expel them. When he returned there two years later, he was "mightily grieved" to note that the novices were "rude, of low mentality, and incorrigible." Eudes records that it was the prior himself who had received many useless and intractable novices, and forbade him to receive any more without his knowledge and special permission. The novices had been there almost three years and had as yet made no profession "because of their rudeness and weak mentality." Eudes ordered the prior to have them make profession and then do as he saw fit with them, "either sending them to other houses of his Order to be formed by the disciplines of the Rule, or keeping them there, as he preferred." Perhaps Eudes had some hopes of their future improvement, that they might be "formed by the discipline of the Rule" and come in time to flourish in the monastic life.

BUILDINGS AND REPAIRS

New construction, repairs, and maintenance work were routine in most houses: although Cluny is somewhat exceptional in this regard because of the massive scale of its building programs, in its first 200 years there was always some building going on somewhere. At the priory of Saint-Evroult (1262) Eudes found the chapter house had been closed for many days and was being used to store wine and for other "inappropriate uses"; he ordered it opened, the cloister grounds made level, and the windows of the church repaired or blocked up since gusts of wind were coming through the window into the nave. Eudes found a very unsatisfactory state of affairs in 1267 at the priory of La Lande-Patry where, among other things, the church was "filled with wood and beams and boxes," which he ordered them to clean up. They could not spend the night there "because the houses were not adequate to receive us," and so returned to spend the night at the abbey of Belle-Etoile, which Eudes had just visited earlier that same day (in fact, when he left Belle-Etoile he had spared them the burden of paying procuration, "considering their devotion and the work which they were doing for the divine cult and for the betterment of the monastery." They may not have been too happy to see the archbishop and his retinue returning!) The priory of Pré had burned

down in 1243, and when Eudes visits there in 1248 he clearly thinks that the presence of construction workers is disrupting community life: the cloister is neither closed nor guarded "because of the presence of workmen," and "for the same reason" the rule of silence is observed only in the church and dormitory. The monks often eat with guests (maybe this includes some of those workmen?), and they do not hold their chapter meeting every day, "partly because there are so few of them, and partly because of the workmen." At his 1264 visit of the chapter at the church of Saint-Mellon-de-Pontoise, Eudes notes that "as upon other occasions" he found "great defects … as to the repair of books, and as to the roofing of the monastery," and ordered a sequestration of the canons' property to "have the hall properly repaired," among other things.

Neglect of proper maintenance, or worse, may sometimes have been the result of properties having been leased out, insofar as it meant a withdrawal of the mother-house's immediate attention to that holding. When he came to Saint-Hilaire (1263), a priory of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, Eudes found it had been totally destroyed by fire, and ordered the prior (staying nearby at Saint-James, also a priory of Saint-Benoît) to rebuild the place. Eudes celebrated a parochial Mass at the church at Saint-James (thus the church there also served the local parish) and then visited there. He learned that the prior of (now destroyed) Saint-Hilaire was leasing the priory of Saint-James from the mother-house, Saint-Benoît, meaning that he managed its affairs and received all its income and revenues; and he learned that Saint-James had other problems (in addition to being managed by a negligent lessee?): the abbot of Saint-Benoît had received papal permission to "appropriate to his table the fruits of some of his priories, and had in consequence diminished the number of monks and had leased out" Saint-James. This is an arrangement that Eudes clearly thinks is detrimental to the priory at Saint-James: there were fewer monks there than there should be (only four instead of seven), the monks eat meat, sometimes eat with lay folk in "their village," and the grange was in a ruinous state and its roof needed repair. In 1254 the nunnery of Saint-Amand (forty-four nuns) was in debt because of an aqueduct which they had just built. At Saint-Aubin, a Cistercian priory (1264) of twelve nuns, the houses needed repairs, the roof of the main building was so leaky they could not stay when the weather was rainy, they did not chant their Hours because many of them had been sick for a long time, and the prioress was at that time lying ill in bed, so Eudes could not obtain complete information about the house. At Bondeville (1264) where there were thirty nuns, four lay sisters, and two lay brothers, they complained that "doves flew through the choir and chancel and created a tumult there which, as they said, disturbed the Divine

Office." Eudes ordered them to block up most of the windows, "for several of them were superfluous."

PRIVATE PROPERTY

Private property is held by monks and nuns in a number of the houses inspected by Eudes over his twenty-one-year period of visitations. We recall that Saint Benedict had strictly limited personal property to clothes, shoes, a knife, handkerchief, needle, and writing materials (#55 of the *Rule*). Eudes's toleration of any possessions is technically a "bending" of the Rule, but it may have been a wise concession, first because it was impossible to completely stop the practice. Further, he might have reasoned that clinging to personal possessions was not necessarily due to greed, but the need that some may have felt to keep a sense of personal identity and separateness in their community by having something that was theirs alone, and not "ours."[19]

Even so, Eudes clearly disapproves of private property, some types more than others—the larks and small birds kept in cages by the nuns at Sainte-Trinité-de-Caen (1250) seem to be more offensive to him than private coffers or chests. Often, as at Bondeville in 1257, members of the community have private coffers, sometimes with keys. Eudes orders that the keys be taken away, not the coffers—thus, the latter are allowable but the contents cannot be secret. At Montivilliers in 1260 the abbess is ordered to punish "for a grave fault" and as disobedient all who are unwilling to hand over their keys to their private coffers at her request. The problem, however, goes further: "indeed," Eudes notes, "we understood that when the abbess asked them to give her their keys, some of them did not care to do so for two or three days, until they had removed their things and had hidden what they did not wish the abbess to see." In this instance he does not forbid having either coffers or keys—mostly because he cannot—but he insists that the abbess be allowed to inspect them.

Notre-Dame d'Almenèches (1250), with thirty-four nuns, sounds like a very loosely-knit community of people living virtually independently: all of them own property, have their own casseroles, copper kettles, and necklaces; they contract debts in the town, sit at table in "friendly groups," and each has money to provide herself with "cooked food and victuals." At Lisieux (1257) three of the nuns there also had independent incomes, and Eudes does not forbid this because he cannot—but he does order the abbess not to let them do anything with these incomes without her permission. Also the nuns are not to have keys to the "cubicles in the infirmary," where they might presumably spend time and keep even more private possessions.

Another kind of personal property was found at Saint-Aubin in 1266,

where quarrels had arisen among several of the nuns who were keeping their own hens and chickens. In the same year in which Eudes met with a foreign legate (and future pope) to discuss "matters concerning the kingdom of Sicily," convened a church council, preached before an international chapter meeting of the Franciscan Order, and attended the king's Parlement in Paris, he also patiently ordered the nuns of Saint-Aubin to feed all their poultry together and "to possess them in common," and further ordered that "such eggs as might be produced be served equally to the nuns and that occasionally, when it seemed best, some of the chickens be served to the sick."

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (AND MISMANAGEMENT)

As we have seen, monasteries were long-lasting corporations that lived, often for centuries, off landed and other endowments (and Normandy seems to have had a large number of extremely long-lived houses: Mont-Saint-Michel, Saint-Ouen, Montivilliers, Saint-Wandrille, and Jumièges were all "pre-Viking foundations, some founded as early as the seventh century").[20] This does not mean that they did not have difficulty making ends meet in some years, and used all sorts of expedients to get by. The nuns at Villarceaux (1254), pressed for cash, pawned their book of homilies and some of the clerical vestments owned by their house. At Bondeville (1257) the community pawned two chalices to meet expenses, and had five young girls living there who had not been formally received (since new entrants would bring a gift or dowry with them, this was a common practice in houses struggling with financial difficulties, but could obviously lead to "over-population" and the admission of people not well-suited to the monastic life). The nuns had also "farmed out a certain tithe" (meaning they had leased out the right to collect those monies to someone else) for three years for the sum of £75—but since the tithe has a value of £40 per annum they will be losing £45 over the term of the lease. Eudes also notes that they owe servants' wages for harvest time, have only enough oats to last until sowing the spring crop (this visit was made in February and harvest does not begin until August), and have in their cellar six casks of wine and two of cider; after Easter they will need to purchase all their food except bread, peas, and legumes. At the Hôtel-Dieu-de-Caen (1267), he found three canons living there serving "ten weak and aged sisters" who were not clothed as religious but who did live "chastely and without property" according to the Rule. He ordered the prior to "bring them to a common life so far as he could," and especially to give them a sufficient supply of what they needed because these elderly women had in the past, "as they said," sold bonnets and firewood in town to

make extra money. At Bival (1263) Eudes forbade the nuns to sell "on the outside" any bread they had received as their portion; he also was displeased at the provision made for a certain chaplain whom they had "received into their fraternity" (he had been sent away from his own abbey for some undisclosed reason), for he was a burden to the house. Eudes ordered the confiscation of whatever goods or revenues the chaplain was to receive as his "pension" in the diocese, in effect sending this brother away. When he returned to Bival two years later he ordered this chaplain's recall but then withdrew the order when the community "murmured about this and were very heavy of heart. They said and asserted that he was worse now than ever he had been" and they were "in no little fear at the prospect of his return."

The nuns at the priory at Sainte-Marguerite-de-Gouffren (1250) do not wear the same kind of habit "because of their poverty." The twenty-four members of this community have an income of £100 (compare this to Mont-Saint-Michel's income that same year, where forty monks had an income of £5,000). Eudes ordered them to observe community life "in so far as they were able." At Sainte-Trinité-de-Caen (1250) "they don't know what their income is, but they state that more is owed to them than they owe; nor do they know anything about the financial condition of the monastery; nevertheless, the abbess does audit her accounts in her room in the presence of some sisters elected each year for this purpose, and a copy of the computation is on public display in chapter, and this, they say, suffices for them."

Communities sometimes need protection in addition to supervision. The nuns at Bondeville (1262) do not have enough chaplains (there are twenty-eight nuns, seven lay sisters, and three lay brothers), and they "need a steward to manage the affairs of the house and provide for them." At the priory of Saint-Paul near Rouen (1263), where there were six nuns from Montivilliers, Eudes found that the king's sergeants, the forest wardens, had been imposing upon them by eating at their house often and "by molesting without reason their workmen [probably servants] in the forest, although they hold the right to use the forest," for example, to collect firewood. At Mont-Deux-Amants (1265) the subprior and several of the canons had, in the absence of the prior and without his knowledge, secretly purchased the rents from a certain orchard, with money they had borrowed from the doorkeeper of the house. Further, they had drawn up a contract ("badly phrased and almost ridiculous," according to Eudes) and signed it with a seal in the name of the subprior, "although the subprior had no business having his own seal." At Graville (1265), a conventual priory of Augustinian canons, there were twelve canons in residence. Hugh, a certain cleric who had been "received in perpetuity

there, clad in secular garb," had secretly sold part of a certain woodland which had been entrusted to his keeping. Other things were in good condition. At the abbey of Lessay (1266) where there were thirty-one monks, Eudes was "much displeased" to learn that a secular cleric named Master Geoffrey had for years been (what we would call) the abbey's "business manager," receiving its entire income and paying its bills. With the consent of the abbot and community Eudes ordered that a monk should be attached to Master Geoffrey to "learn and be instructed by this cleric in what manner the temporal affairs of the abbey were run, to know how much they owed and to whom, and, indeed, to become acquainted with the entire state of the house as to temporals, since [as he notes with evident displeasure] not for sixteen years had any monk or any other even taken any part in these things." At Eu (1259) the canons' clothing was poor, hence there was some question about the keeper of the reliquary, whose income in offerings and rents provided the funds to purchase the canons' clothing. Eudes orders that if the revenue from this is not sufficient it should be made up "from the common fund." The keeper of the reliquary is to render an account at least once a year of all incomes, in the presence of some brothers elected by the community for this purpose, and he is to prepare an itemized list of expenses, for oil, for the lamps, "or other things." Chalices and all books are to be openly displayed to the community once a year and a list of these is to be made and kept in a large book.

At Saint-Ouen-de-Rouen, where there are fifty monks in 1258, Eudes forbids the practice of allowing traders and apothecaries to come into the monastery, entering the cloister, and offering things for sale to the monks. The funds for alms were too small, alms were infrequently dispensed, and the almoner had a hard time just getting wicks and oil for the four lamps in the chapter. Eudes advises the abbot to check into the difficulties the almoner was having, to see that he had enough income to do what needed to be done, and to try to increase the amount of alms given out. The following year, in the interests of transparency, Eudes orders *daily* accounts to be given by the kitchener, the monk in charge of the granary, the infirmarian, and the other officers of the house. These accounts are to be heard each day by some of the elder brothers of the community, they are to be read out in full report to the community from time to time, and a copy of the audit is to be entered in writing. (It did not help matters that the abbot of Saint-Ouen was a "drunkard, and grew loquacious after dining" when he made "hasty promises.") At Bondeville (1261) Eudes dismissed Melchior, the priest, who had been managing the affairs of the nunnery for a time, "because the community did not have complete confidence in him and he had become hateful to them." At

Saint-Wandrille (1262) "certain dissatisfied ones" complained to Eudes that they were not informed of the value of the income from their granges and that the abbot did not give the community information concerning leased properties or the value of rents, so Eudes enjoined the abbot to associate five or six senior monks with him whenever he leased out land, drew up the accounts, and estimated the value of the rents.

INCONTINENCE AND "VAGABONDING" MONKS AND NUNS

Being incontinent, that is, sexually active, is a violation of one of the three great monastic vows. It is a charge that is made many times in the pages of the *Register*, less often for the regular than the secular clergy (who of course had more opportunities to seek out illicit relationships than did monks and nuns). The charge of unchastity is frequently just that, a charge and not a statement of fact or proof, a distinction that Eudes is careful to make. At Saint-Saëns (1259) one Nichola (whether nun or servant is not clear) gave birth to a child there in the monastery itself, where she was attended by two midwives from the village. The baby was also baptized there and then sent to one of the mother's sisters, and the mother was "churched" (i.e., attended church forty days after the birth of her child to give thanks) in the church of the monastery (this in fact was the second child Nichola had had there, in both cases the father being Simon, the priest at the local church in Saint-Saëns).

A condition of serial incontinence seems to prevail at the priory at Villarceaux (1249). Eudes begins his report by noting that the cloister is not closed off, and subsequent details demonstrated that this is certainly true: Joan of l'Aillerie at one time left the cloister, went to live with a man and had a child by him, and now she sometimes goes out to see the child. The cellaress is "ill famed" of two men, the subprioress of Thomas the carter, and her sister Idonia of another man, "and this ill fame has arisen within the year." (To be "ill-famed" means that an inquiry had already been made into the truth of these allegations and that these two women were already held in general "ill repute."[21]) The prior of Gisors often comes to see Idonia, three other nuns are ill famed of clerics, and another of Sir Andrew of Mussy, knight. All the nuns let their hair grow down to the chin and put saffron on their veils (this give their clothes a glowing golden color). Jacqueline left the priory pregnant as a result of relations with one of the chaplains, who was expelled (and who had also had relations with Agnes). Further, the prioress is drunk nearly every night, does not get up for Matins, does not eat in the refectory, and does not correct excesses.

Sometimes Eudes seems to act on report and not wait for full

verification, as at the priory at Saint-Aubin in 1256. Here he took the veil away (a thing he almost never does) from Alice of Rouen and Eustasia of Etrépagny because of their fornications, and he sent Agnes of Pont to the leper house at Rouen, presumably to serve there, because she had "connived at Eustasia's fornication, and indeed had even arranged it, as the rumor goes." Further she had also (according to report) given Eustasia some "herbs to drink" in order to end her pregnancy. Eudes includes language that indicates these are rumors and reports and not proven facts, but the charges are so severe—and as must have often been the case, perhaps he was not in any doubt about the truth of them. Charges of incontinence were not confined to heterosexual relations: at the abbey of Jumièges in 1248, Eudes learns that Brother William of Beaunay and Brother William of Bourg-Achard were "ill-famed of the worst vice." At Saint-Victor-en-Caux in 1263 he ordered the abbot to (among many other things) impose a suitable penance on William the cellarer for having bathed in the presence of laymen (which certainly suggests a degree of unseemly laxity!), and to inquire into a charge of sodomy against an old monk, Robert, and send the result of the investigation to Eudes himself.

Another form of straying from the path is wandering off from the monastery altogether. At Saint-Laurent in Lyons, an Augustinian priory (1259), two of the canons, "led astray by a certain levity of spirit, had gone away and were vagabonding." Eudes uses similar language to characterize four nuns at the priory of Saint-Aubin (1263), two of whom had gone off in search of alms, and two others, "led away by frivolity of soul, had departed at the devil's instigation." None was to be readmitted without Eudes's "special permission." At Bourg-Achard (1260) he allowed Dom Geoffrey, "who had been vagabonding for a long time," to come back into the community, with appropriate discipline. Eudes must uniformly condemn such actions but he does not hold all perpetrators equally culpable, as seen in his comment that Luke Capet, one of the canons of the chapter of Saint Sépulcre of Caen (1256), "runs about the town disgracefully and gets intoxicated very easily; but then he is weak in the head." At Corneville (1257), a house of nine Augustinian canons, Eudes found that the canons "occasionally leave the cloister" to enjoy the pleasant past-time of watching someone else work, in this case some "workers engaged at the house" (whether these are construction workers or regular laborers going about their tasks is not said). At Saint-Léger-des-Préaux (1257) there are forty-five nuns who, in addition to having coffers and keys, two small dogs and three squirrels, also go outside the main abbey "when they can and return whenever they like." Eudes orders them to "get rid of as many of the horde of maidservants as they could conveniently, as well as the dogs and squirrels," and tells

the abbess to inspect the coffers frequently during the year and "discipline" any property owners, "should there be such." In 1251 Eudes found at the priory Saint-Michel-sur-Vernonnet that the monks sleep in different rooms, do not say their Hours "with modulation" (meaning that they chant the psalms and prayers of the Divine Office in a flat, monotone voice, without inflection), do not observe the fasts of the Rule, eat meat, and allow "people of the world, clerics, laymen, and women" to eat with them ("and sometimes they eat with lay folk in town"). We are not surprised to learn that one of the monks, "Brother Thomas," wore gold rings and "used to go out at night, clad in a cuirass [a leather breastplate], without his monk's habit, and associate with low companions; he has wounded many at night, both lay and cleric, and has himself been wounded and has had the tip of his finger cut off. We ordered the abbot to remove him, or else we would seize the place and expel the monks." In the record of his 1250 visit to the monastery of Le Tréport, Eudes gives some of the history of a William of Moncel, a fugitive monk who had returned to the monastery after being away for four years. He used to carry a knife at all times, was "publicly known" for incontinence, and occasionally turned violent: he once killed two pigs at another priory when the head of the house refused to give him a drink. At Saint-Saëns (1259) Eudes found that some of the nuns stayed out too long when they were given permission to leave by the prioress; and one Joan Martel, who was "rebellious and disobedient," rode out on horseback to see her relatives, dressed in secular garb, and had her own messenger whom she often sent to her relatives. At Aumale (1255) there were many problems, the chief of which was that anyone who goes beyond the gate of the house without permission is *not* regarded as a runaway. At Lisieux (1257) one nun was allowed by the abbess to stay alone (i.e., without a monastic companion) at the house of a relative who is sick. Eudes orders the abbess not to allow anyone to leave the abbey alone again. In the medieval monastery, people like Brother Thomas, William of Moncel, and Joan Martel are not typical, but neither are they unusual figures.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AND PRISON

Even if it did not necessarily conform to the definition of a "total institution," as discussed above in the Introduction, at times a monastic house could function as a real prison for the confinement of nonconformist monks and nuns. Several cases occur in the pages of Eudes's *Register*, where his interest is in punishing the offender and equally in preventing the contagion of his or her bad example from infecting the entire community. At the abbey at Le Val-Sainte-Marie (1267) a certain canon being kept there in prison would sometimes

yell out in abusive language, disturbing the community to such an extent that Eudes ordered the abbot to have his prison constructed somewhere else. At Saint-Laurent-en-Lyons (1259), one of the monks, Brother Richard, who was then staying at an outside priory, had performed a clandestine (secret) marriage between a certain man and Richard's own daughter, whom he had begotten after he had become a monk and received priestly orders. Eudes ordered the prior to recall this Richard to the cloister, prohibit him from celebrating Mass or performing any office in the house, and restrict him to a diet of bread and water for forty days. He was not to leave the cloister during that time or afterwards. At Sainte-Catherine (1250), "Caleboche and another monk, who are now in prison, sing dissolute songs; we ordered that they be corrected by cutting off their food and subjecting them to flagellation."

Like most medieval churchmen, Eudes worries about the power of a bad example. At Saint-Wandrille (1265) he records with evident approval that one of the monks, Brother William of Modec, was being held in isolation and shut off from all association with the community, because he had "evilly spoken words in open chapter which had scandalized and disturbed the community"; and he adds "we did not care to make any change in such an ordinance." The fear that one bad monk can affect others is apparent in Eudes's remarks concerning a canon of the priory of Saint-Mary Magdalene at Rouen (1254), Roger of Berville, who "would willingly stir up trouble if he could find any confederates." In 1249 at Ouville, a house of Augustinian canons, Eudes orders the prior to prepare a separate place in the house for John Gaul, who had often withdrawn from the order. He was not to be allowed to be at large in the monastery, no one was to talk to him without permission from the prior, and a book should be given to him "that he may sing his Hours" alone. He is free to leave the house altogether if he wishes, but if he does so he is to be "permanently expelled from the order." At the priory at Juziers in 1259, Eudes discovers that a court is held in the cloister, and that there is even a prison next to the cloister "where malefactors and thieves were confined." Eudes orders them to hold court somewhere else "far from the church, and to build their prison beyond the consecrated ground and beyond the churchyard."

THE "WORLD" (ESPECIALLY THE PARISH) IN THE MONASTERY

Another intersection of monk, nun, and "the world" was created whenever the conventual church also functioned as a parish church for the local laity. In fact, perhaps we can imagine a special kind of parish being created when the monastery was small and shared a priest with an equally small congregation of lay people in the same

church: for example, the sixteen nuns at Saint-Aubin (1259) have a parish priest at their expense who celebrates Mass for them and for the fifteen parishioners of the local parish where that priory is located. In 1263 Eudes learns that the *only* Mass which the six nuns at the priory of Saint Paul near Rouen hear each day is in fact the "parochial Mass." At Saint Ouen (1266), where Divine Service is disturbed "because of the parish which was in their monastery" (note Eudes's language), the community agrees with Eudes that a separate parish church should be built near the abbey for the use of the parishioners; and though he reports that the "house was in bad state as to temporals," he still finds that "with God's grace it was well with them in spirituals."

At Corneville (1257) an interesting (and noisy) jurisdictional problem arises when the people of the parish on occasion come to the monastery to hear Mass, and ring the two bells which they possess in the monastery tower. Eudes ordered the community to build a partition between the bells "so that the canons might sound their own bells more freely and be able to concentrate upon the divine cult with more quiet." In his 1254 visit to the two monks at the priory at Tichreville, Eudes learns that on some days neither of them celebrates Mass (which is to be celebrated everyday, of course)—in fact, the Mass books and church plate they use belong to the parish church there. Eudes orders them to get their own books, vestments, and chalice so that they can "celebrate Mass whenever they desire without using the ornaments of the parish." Another kind of jurisdictional dispute appears at Longueil (1254), where there are four monks but no prior because of a disagreement between the lord of the village who wants "a prior of his own choosing" and the abbot of the monastery of Tiron (the mother-house of Longueil) who wants to choose the prior. In 1251 at La Roche-Guyon there are four monks where there should only be three, because the "lord of the village had asked for one always to say the Masses for the dead."

At Eu (1257) Eudes finds that lay folk enter the cloister and church "altogether too much" and instructs the community to restrain these outsiders "so far as this could be done tactfully." The root of the problem becomes apparent during a visitation there five years later: after a lengthy discussion "in chapter" about how the entrance and approach to the chancel (i.e., eastern end of the church where the altar is located and Mass celebrated) could easily be made inaccessible to lay folk, the brothers stated "that great harm would be done if they did not open the entrance to the choir and chancel, and especially to the relics." That "great harm" includes financial loss to the community if people could not approach the relics and leave an offering, perhaps damage to the reputation for sanctity of the house, and also a spiritual

loss to the faithful. Even so, at Ouville (1260) the canons were ordered to put their reliquary outside the chancel so that lay folk who came there would not pass freely in front of the canons or talk to them as they passed. At the priory of Notre Dame of Pré (1261) it is specifically stated that lay folk should be kept out of the cloister, especially the women who were "in the habit of passing through the cloister on their way to the monastery church when memorial Masses for their friends were to be celebrated." Eudes suggested that the women stay in the nave of the monastery church (i.e., outside the chancel). At Gasny in 1264, Eudes orders the three monks there to build a gateway so that a shorter and more private passage might be made from their residence to the parish church, as had been done in some of their other houses.

At the priory of Neufmarché there were problems with adequately providing for the priest who served the monks and the local laity in the church that belonged to the priory. In 1261 Eudes notes that the priest has no clerk and orders the prior to give the priest a clerk "who would be suitable to help the priest, both by day and by night, in psalmody, in serving at the altar, and in attending him on his parish calls by day or by night." In 1263 the priest still has "no clerk or servant to carry the hand bell through the village whensoever he went to visit the sick" (a stray and vivid detail about the duties a parish priest's clerk would perform). This particular priest's dissatisfaction seems to have finally overcome him, for in his 1264 visit Eudes learns that the parish church there is not being served at all because the priest left for the Holy Land—Eudes ordered this corrected (i.e., another priest appointed in his place).

The "world" also percolates into the monastery in getting and spending. At the Hôtel-Dieu at Rouen (1264), where there were ten canons in residence and twenty sisters, Eudes found one thing that "much displeased" him: "certain stalls were placed along the chapel wall and at the entrance to the hospital, where hoods and such things were sold in an unseemly fashion, and because of this the chapel was put to improper uses." Eudes orders the prior of the Hôtel-Dieu at Caen (1267) to more fully ensure the observance of a common life and guard against trading activity by seeing to it that the community received "a sufficient supply of things needful to them so that they should not have to buy or sell anything in the town."

In some ways the regularity of town and monastery relations was reinforced by the system of visitation itself, since the monastery often had to purchase provisions from the outside to feed and house the visitor and his retinue. This is made clear in the 1259 visitation of the priory at Sérans le Bouteiller. Here Eudes is owed a procuration fee of seventy shillings plus domestic utensils and dishes, fodder for the

horses, straw, wood, and coal "such as might be found in the village," as contained in a "letter of agreement." However, a disagreement arose between Eudes's steward (the official who would see to his lodging and supplies) and the prior who was there, about seeking in the town for feather beds, wood, cooking utensils, hay, and stabling for the horses. Eudes and his associates discussed this and agreed that the prior did not have to provide feather beds, since only straw mattresses are mentioned in the agreement (although a feather bed would have been most welcome to Eudes whose rheumatism flared up periodically and sometimes prevented him from carrying out his duties: indeed in that same year, 1259, his visitation tour was interrupted when "our old rheumatism attacking us once again, we were unable to proceed further, but were compelled to take to our bed"). Thus, putting the visitor and his retinue up for the night requires the monastic community to purchase goods and services from local people.

Sometimes it is the parishioners, not the monks or nuns, who object to sharing their church and priest with a community of religious: at Neufmarché (1257) the parishioners complained because the parish priest eats at the monks' table and the "parish Mass is always celebrated in the monks' choir." Eudes ordered the prior to "build a special altar" that would not be in the choir or chancel of the church, where the parish priest "should celebrate Mass every day." At Le Tréport there were certainly grounds for complaint in 1255, where Eudes found that the abbot had "unjustly" levied tithes from newly-cultivated ground on some of "his parishioners." In this case, where land held by the monastery includes a parish church, the abbot is acting like a secular cleric and trying to increase the traditional revenues attached to the church.

The relationship between the "world" and the monastery, although sometimes an adversarial one, could just as easily create common ground and a common outlook, an instance of which is seen in Eudes's visitation of the abbey of Ivry (1258) at the feast of Pentecost. In full regalia, the archbishop and the monks of the abbey together processed to the monastic church, and there, "while the people and the monks were standing in the body of the church," Eudes preached a sermon to this mixed lay and clerical congregation, celebrated High Mass, and then "visited the monks in chapter" afterwards. Similarly, at Bourg-Achard (1268) on the feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin, Eudes celebrated High Mass at the priory, then "preached in the middle of the church to the canons of the place and to the local parishioners who were standing by," and then carried out a visitation of the community "in chapter."

"THINGS WERE WELL WITH THEM"

The connection between the material conditions and spiritual state of a house was widely understood in monastic culture, and it seems to be deeply ingrained in Eudes's way of thinking, too, that the state of affairs at a monastic house depends on its spiritual and temporal condition. Yet, at the end of many of his visitation reports Eudes makes a clear statement about the temporal and/or spiritual condition of a house, and sometimes his final pronouncement seems (at least to us) to be at variance with what he found there. For example, the eighty monks at Bec-Hellouin (1254) do not read the Statutes, do not observe the fasts of the Rule, and eat meat—but "All other things are in good condition." At Saint-Amand (1262) Eudes discovered "general discord and bitterness of heart" among the fifteen nuns living there and "charged the abbess and confessor to compel, by restrictions on wine and pittances, those hereafter found thus at fault to become reconciled and live in charity so far as possible." The nuns were not to make alms-bags, needle-cases, neck-bands, and the like, "but rather to work on such as pertained to the divine cult, as best they knew how." The abbess did not have her accounts ready, but they "were of the opinion that more was owed to them than they owed." He concludes with the observation that all else is "in good condition."

At Saint-Ouen-de-Rouen (1264) where there are sixty monks, Eudes notes that they were "in a good spiritual state, but the same was not true of their temporal affairs" for two specific reasons: first, the abbot's sister and her husband, Master William were doing "grievous injury to the house in the matter of wine, wheat, food, oats, and other things." Secondly, Eudes had earlier learned that the abbot had recalled three monks from Sigy, a priory of Saint-Ouen, in order to appropriate some of its income for himself "without reasonable cause." This had left only three monks at Sigy, thus reducing its income and "diminishing" the Divine Service there which "displeased us greatly." He closes the record of the 1264 visit at Saint-Ouen noting: "And so we went away feeling frustrated because we could not find out what was the material condition of the monks or that of the monastery, as would be necessary and helpful for us." At his next visit there (1265) Eudes notes that "the articles of the Rule covering the eating of meat and the observance of the fasts are badly kept in the priories"—and yet he states that the "spiritual state [of the monastery] with God's grace was good." We noted above that Eudes found that the Divine Service was disturbed at Saint-Ouen in 1266 "because of the parish which was in their monastery"; yet his pronouncement at that time was that the "house was in a bad state as to temporals, although with God's grace it was well with them in spirituals."

As much as Eudes deplores the eating of meat and not reading the

Statutes, he also deplores having insufficient numbers at outlying priories, bad leadership, not accusing each other in chapter, and insolvency. In other words, there are many factors that go into what Eudes considers to be essential for a house to be "in good condition," and no one in all of Europe (especially someone who traveled over 54,000 miles looking into all kinds of problems) knew better than he that some things were easier to correct than others. But more importantly, it seems that things do not have to be perfect in a monastic house for it to be worthy, for it to be "well with them in spirituals," even in the eyes of one who has been described as a "model archbishop."[22] Indeed, a view of the monastic life as a striving for an ideal, as a work-in-progress, in which each facet of daily life is connected to all others, is implicit in Saint Benedict's own words at the end of the prologue to his *Rule*, where he describes the monastery as a "school for the Lord's service":

> The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this [monastic] way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments.… Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom.[23]

THE SPIRIT NOT THE LETTER OF THE LAW

We may still ask, however, what sort of infraction of the monastic rule was most upsetting to the great reformer? One of the offenses that displeased him the most, judging by his language, was to find a monk dwelling alone at a priory. Why? Because that is a thorough-going violation of the monastic vocation, which requires a common life. Only hermits who "have built up their strength and go from the battle line in the ranks of their brothers to the single combat of the desert" (#1 of Benedict's *Rule*) should truly "dwell alone," not a monk who has embraced the common life and its discipline. A rare instance where Eudes seems to be particularly incensed (and allows it to show) occurred during the visitation at Saint-Saëns (1259), where he learned that the community had promised to receive and veil four nieces of some of the nuns, and had letters from the community recording this agreement. "In full chapter" Eudes "broke and tore [these letters] to pieces … being highly annoyed at a concession of this kind." What would disturb him so in this case? The community had been

instructed before not to “receive or veil anyone without our special permission” and had ignored that injunction; and since Saint-Saëns that year numbered only fifteen nuns, an addition of four would be considerable, especially since there is no assurance that the niece of a nun is necessarily more fit than someone else to enter a monastery—indeed, an increase in familial ties within the community could be seen by most sincere reformers as a threat to the common life. That this “concession” had been given greater weight and permanence by being drawn up in a written document was an added aggravation.

In the course of those 1,019 visitations made over nearly a quarter of a century, Eudes saw much that pleased and displeased him. He was wise to focus on those things he had the best chance of influencing to some degree, and not to pit his authority against every ingrained abuse, weighing instead the essentials, encouraging internal reform, perhaps reminding himself that it is the spirit and not the letter of the law that matters most, and that each monk, each nun, indeed each community is a “work in progress”: as Benedict said, “through patience” one may deserve to share in Christ’s kingdom. Still, it must have been hard for such a man to listen to the monks at the priory of Liancourt in 1251 who told him that they eat meat whenever they are bled and, “to be sociable,” they also do so whenever the monks from the mother-abbey (Saint-Père-de-Chartres) come to visit them. Eudes notes: “We reproved them and forbade them to break the Rule for the sake of being sociable.” In 1256 at Auffay, where there were five monks, he could not have been pleased to hear them say that although they ate meat and did not confess or fast according to the Rule, “their conscience was clear in these matters.” Not much better, perhaps, were the eighteen monks at Pré in 1256 who “eat meat when there is no need, but, as they say, they eat only a little.” At the priory of Saint-Aubin (1261) the nuns told Eudes that they did not receive Communion as often as they should because it left them without any wine. “After hearing this,” Eudes notes sternly, “we ordered them never to omit receiving Communion for any such reason.”

Our task, as students of history reading the unique records he has left us, is not to decide whether a particular monastery was “good” or “bad,” but rather to acknowledge the different quality of life in each community, just as Eudes himself did over his long career. He died on July 2, 1276, exhausted by his labors,[24] and was buried in the Chapel of the Virgin in Rouen Cathedral. In 1562, when Protestants controlled the city during the wars of religion, the cathedral suffered extensive damage both inside and out, and Eudes’s funerary monument was heavily damaged. In 1769 the canons of the cathedral destroyed the tomb during renovations, and thereafter the site of his burial was covered by a stone. That simple marker was also destroyed,

a generation later during the French Revolution, when the bones and ashes of Eudes and other former archbishops of Rouen were torn from their burial site and scattered beyond recall.[25]

NOTES

1. See O. G. Darlington, *The Travels of Odo Rigaud, Archbishop of Rouen* (Philadelphia, Ph.D. dissertation, 1940), pp. 74–5. While this figure includes all his travels, not just visitations, plus trips to Paris to meet with the King, two trips to England, and one to Italy, most of these miles were traveled as Eudes pursued his archiepiscopal duties in his own province.
2. Adam J. Davis, *The Holy Bureaucrat: Eudes Rigaud and Religious Reform in Thirteenth-Century Normandy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 1.
3. Davis, *Holy Bureaucrat*, pp. 34–5.
4. *The Register of Eudes of Rouen*, ed. Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964). There is an index in the *Register* (pp. 775–9) which provides a list of all the visitations made by Eudes, according to house. The reader may easily look up all the information provided here on Sacey, and every other house discussed. Therefore, page numbers will only be given if the reader could not find the information otherwise.
5. O'Sullivan, *Register*, introduction, p. xxi.
6. C. R. Cheney, *Episcopal Visitation of Monasteries in the Thirteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), p. 151.
7. Darlington, *Travels*, pp. 60, 62.
8. Darlington, *Travels*, p. 58.
9. C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (New York: Longman, Inc., 2001), p. 160.
10. The origin of these particular pittances at Mont-Deux-Amants is described thus in a later visitation there, on April 10, 1266.
11. There are a number of different versions of this ritual. The one described here is from Léo Moulin, *La vie quotidienne des religieux au Moyen Age, Xe–XVe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), pp. 41–5.
12. O'Sullivan, *Register*, p. 9, note 38.
13. For this and much of the following discussion of leprosy, see Peter Richard, *The Medieval Leper and his Northern Heirs* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1978). Quotation here on p. 11.
14. WHO website at http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs101/en/; accessed June 28, 2012.
15. Richard, *Medieval Leper*, p. xv.
16. Richard, *Medieval Leper*, p. 4.
17. The text of this rite is given in Richard, *Medieval Leper*, pp. 123–4.
18. The leper house of Mont-aux-Malades, a leper hospital at Auffay, a leprosary for women at Salle-aux-Puelles, a leper chapel at Longueville, a leper house and a leper hospital at Gournay, a leper hospital at Arques, a leper house at Saint-Aubin, a leper hospital at Bellencombre, a leper house at Orival, and a chapel of Saint Lazarus under the jurisdiction of the church of Saint-Mellon-de-Pontoise.
19. F. Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England, 1240–1540* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 78.
20. Davis, *Holy Bureaucrat*, p. 65.
21. O'Sullivan, *Register*, editor's note, p. 3, note 10.
22. Davis, *Holy Bureaucrat*, p. 7 (quoting R. W. Southern).
23. *Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry

(Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), pp. 165–7.

24. Pierre Andrieu-Guitrancourt, *L'Archevêque Eudes Rigaud et la vie de L'Eglise au XIIIe siècle, d'après le Regestrum Visitationum* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1938), p. 438.

25. Andrieu-Guitrancourt, *L'Archevêque Eudes Rigaud*, pp. 438–9.

Central England (University of Connecticut Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center [MAGIC])

5

GODSTOW NUNNERY, 1133–1540: A WOMEN'S COMMUNITY OF THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Nunneries in the Middle Ages were fewer in number, smaller in size, less well endowed, and left fewer records than male monastic houses: in England, for example, nuns made up only about 20 percent of the total monastic population in the 1340s and in the 1530s. In Henry VIII's 1535 survey of the 660 existing monasteries and their wealth, twenty-four monasteries had an annual income over £1,000, and only two of these were nunneries (out of a total of 136 nunneries); on the other end of the spectrum, impoverished houses, defined as those that had an income of less than £50 a year, included half (66 out of 136) of all nunneries, while only 13 percent of male houses fell into this category. Two-thirds of all nunneries had fewer than twelve residents in 1536, when Henry passed an "Act for the Suppression of the Lesser Monasteries."[1]

Medieval nunneries have long been regarded with a special curiosity. In the seventeenth century, Protestant church historian Thomas Fuller remarked that "virginity is least kept where it is most constrained." Such negative ideas are not confined to early modern England, a time and place of virulent anti-Catholic sentiment: in the twenty-first century, nuns are frequently thought of as women who lead an unnatural existence because they live without men.[2] Further, characters from medieval literature are sometimes taken at face value and read as a mirror of ordinary reality: in *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400) paints a portrait of the Prioress, Madame Eglantyne, a well-dressed lady who eats daintily, adores lap dogs, and wears a golden brooch attached to her rosary beads that bears the inscription *Amor vincit omnia*, "Love conquers all"—the very image of self-indulgent laxity. In a (less famous) poem of the fifteenth century, entitled *Why I cannot be a nun*, a young girl who desires to enter a nunnery has a dream in which personified vices take over an abbey (headed by an abbess named Dame Disobedient!), and is duly discouraged from taking the veil.[3]

Historians have tended to favor a "moral history" approach to the study of life in a medieval monastery, that is, evaluating a community

(and especially nunneries) according to how closely it followed the *Rule* of Saint Benedict—just as most of the medieval clergy did! Even good historians sometimes forget that the records they depend on for studying medieval monasteries are often inherently negative, such as visitation records, or that the "reports" of squalor, mismanagement, and scandalous behavior in sixteenth-century English monasteries were drawn up by royal surveyors at the time of the Dissolution. The preamble to the Act for the Suppression of the Lesser Monasteries (1536) notes the "manifest sin, vicious, carnal and abominable living … committed among the little and small abbeys"; and Henry VIII and his agents were not the only ones who thought (or at least claimed to think) that the quality of monastic life was particularly "abominable" in smaller houses (and most nunneries were small in sixteenth-century England). In spite of this propaganda, there is in fact no evidence that small male monasteries were any less prone to "poverty, mismanagement and scandal" than nunneries.[4]

But these are the views of officials on the royal payroll, charged with the task of dismantling monasteries (a royal initiative that has been described as the "confiscation of the savings of the piety of five centuries"[5]), institutions that had been fixtures of the English landscape for hundreds upon hundreds of years (Saint Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, dissolved by Henry VIII on July 30, 1538, was founded in 598, making it exactly 940 years old). A less frequently asked question is how did medieval religious themselves regard their way of life; and what were the opinions of so-called ordinary people? Were the nuns of Godstow really "bad" nuns because they slept with feather pillows, had wine-sipping parties after Compline, or received letters from outside? One way to gauge popular opinion is to look at the level of support which nunneries received from the "public." Public opinion would always matter to a monastery, but especially to nunneries because they were more financially dependent on their neighbors than were male monasteries.

Women's monasticism was more "fluid, informal and varied" than men's, indeed in some respects the purposes for which male and female houses were founded differed.[6] In general, male monasteries were founded early and were frequently situated near castles and in towns, where they would add to the prestige, royal and noble, of founders and patrons. Nunneries were founded somewhat later (in England, most of them after the Norman Conquest of 1066), often by women on lands they had received as dowry when they married. The families that established nunneries tended to belong to the minor gentry (i.e., landholding families), and the houses they founded were therefore simpler in construction, tended to have a greater number of structures in wood rather than stone, and were less frequently

"renovated" over time than male monasteries. As a result, nunneries were more dependent on a regular stream of gifts and benefactions and thus were "closely linked to the gentry of their locality, people concerned with local parish and village affairs and local family ties."[7]

Nunneries also tended to be rural or suburban, as opposed to urban: of the c. 150 nunneries in England and Wales, only twenty-five were urban, and few of these were in the heart of town.[8] Given nuns' needs in terms of religious service (women could not say the Mass, obviously), many were sited at the edge of a village, an arrangement which enabled the nuns to share their church (and thus a priest) with the local congregation, as we saw in Eudes's Normandy. Nunneries also had needs in terms of agricultural labor service, in which case the neighboring village provided a source of labor; indeed, a nunnery might employ a whole village: the village of (aptly named) Nun Monkton (Yorkshire) was situated on land held by a local nunnery which employed the villagers as agricultural laborers, weavers, tailors, blacksmiths, and cart-makers. In very poor rural houses the nuns might themselves engage in such productive activities: the nuns of Swaffham Bulbeck (Cambridgeshire) raised their own sheep and produced wool from them. Brewing and dairying were traditional women's occupations, and where these were carried out inside a nunnery, they may often have employed the nuns themselves.[9]

Given the close ties between communities of women and the people outside, we can perhaps read the evidence of public opinion more closely than the evidence for a male house, in terms of daily life inside the monastery. When a woman entered a nunnery, took her vows to embrace poverty, chastity, and obedience, when her hair was shorn off, that symbol of her personality and even sensuality, and she donned a new gown as a "bride of Christ,"[10] what sort of life might she envision in that place? In what ways did she leave the world behind? We will look for some answers in the evidence for Godstow Abbey, a nunnery that, in spite of its aristocratic foundation, developed strong links with its immediate neighborhood for a number of reasons, typical and not-so-typical.

GODSTOW ABBEY

The Abbey of Saint Mary the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist at Godstow (the name means "God's holy place") was a Benedictine nunnery, located two miles upstream from Oxford on the Thames River, founded in c. 1133. The conventual church was dedicated by the bishop of Lincoln in 1139, with King Stephen, Queen Matilda, and their son Eustace in attendance, along with archbishops and bishops, abbots, a papal legate, and members of the secular nobility. The first half of the twelfth century was an era of great enthusiasm for

establishing new religious houses, when the number of monasteries in England nearly doubled, and Godstow was part of this "stream of religious life." Its founder was Edith Launcelene, a noble lady and widow who, according to tradition, heard a voice in the night telling her to rise up and without delay go where the light of heaven shone upon the earth, to establish there a house to the service of God, and to find twenty-four of the most noble women that she could to join her. The land so chosen belonged to a John of Saint John, who gave the land to Edith, her successors, and the community, in return for prayers for the souls of his parents and ancestors; the only stipulation attached was that the nuns themselves should elect an abbess when that office fell vacant, and no one else (a provision straight out of the *Rule* itself). Edith endowed the new foundation with most of her personal fortune, became the first abbess, and her daughters Emma and Havis became nuns with her, each in turn becoming prioress there. Thus, from its foundation Godstow illustrates the neighborhood, personal, and family associations that were so important in establishing women's religious houses.

Forty years later, in 1180, Godstow became a royal abbey when its patron, the son-in-law of John of Saint John, "granted forever to King Henry II the place of the abbey of Godstow, and all the lordship, right, and patronage … to him and his successors … so that the aforesaid abbey hereafter be had … in the chief crown of the king."[11] As a royal abbey it survived for another 359 years, until its disestablishment in 1539 by Henry VIII.

PHYSICAL LAYOUT

Like monasteries everywhere, as we have seen, Godstow was organized to separate the community from the world outside and to promote good order within. The abbey was divided up into an inner court, where the younger nuns were supposed to confine themselves, and an outer court where outsiders conferred with the abbess and where the rooms for guests and boarders were situated. Lodgings for the priests who lived on the grounds were also probably located in this outer court. A male gatekeeper was in charge of the great entrance that led from the outer court to the outside world, and his rooms seem to have been situated over the gate itself, just as Benedict had desired (#66):

> At the door of the monastery shall be placed a wise old man who shall know how to receive a reply and to return one: whose ripeness of age will not permit him to trifle. Which doorkeeper ought to have a cell next to the door.

The inner court contained a "parlor" where the abbess met with visitors, entertained guests, and conferred with the agents who managed Godstow's properties, collected its rents, and generally supervised its economic ties to the outside. All interviews between the nuns and their visitors took place in this room in the presence of the abbess herself or some other trustworthy nun. The dormitory was probably built over the cloister and the doors were to be guarded and only opened at certain times. Also in the inner court was a separate set of buildings where the nuns had a room to board the girls they took in as pupils. The conventual grounds included a chapter house, refectory, kitchen, infirmary, fishponds, and a conduit that supplied the community with drinking water. Godstow also had its own burial grounds: late nineteenth-century excavations to enlarge the stream that bordered the site of the old convent turned up some thirty coffins, of stone and of oak, and floor tiles dating to the twelfth century. (Other finds made during drainage works along the Thames in the nineteenth century, and digs carried out in the twentieth include iron keys, metal book clasps and belt fittings, plaster pieces with traces of fresco, and a human vertebra.)[12] North of the convent stood the church that was used by the nuns and the neighboring population alike, an arrangement that was more common in the early Middle Ages when churches were few and far between, but that continued to characterize monasteries and their neighborhoods throughout the Middle Ages, as we have seen. Some separation of the nuns from the laity was achieved by the existence of separate entrances for each and, inside the church, the choir where the altar was located was reserved for the nuns, while everyone else stood during services in the nave or side chapels.

FINANCIAL STATUS

The new community at Godstow was of modest size from the start and remained so. It was built to house twenty-four nuns and probably rarely exceeded twenty at any one time: only sixteen nuns were there when the house was visited by Bishop Alnwick on May 29, 1445. In spite of its aristocratic foundations and early royal patronage, the convent experienced the financial difficulties that were a common feature of the economic history of nunneries. Godstow had to compete for benefactions with numerous other religious houses that were older and larger. It rarely received large-scale gifts of money or land: in fact, one of the few fairly substantial donations was given specifically because the house was having financial problems. In 1289 (deed 177, from the *Register*, discussed below), dame Royse la Moyne gave the abbey twenty-four silver marks to buy lands and tenements in the town of Gloucester "to the more plentiful sustaining of the said

monastery in time coming." In 1316 King Edward II took the nunnery under his protection due to poverty, and the nuns were taking in boarders to make ends meet by 1357, if not earlier. Individual nuns might experience particular hardship, as we know from the practice at Godstow of keeping an emergency fund in a special chest for poor nuns—a chest that Bishop Grey found empty in his 1432 visitation (he ordered that the 100 shillings that should have been there be replaced immediately). The existence of an emergency fund does not suggest that some of the nuns were destitute, but rather that they were accustomed to having individual purchasing power.

Gifts in other years, from benefactors of more modest means, also speak to Godstow's slender finances. In 1270 (deed 139) Pain de Chaworth granted the nuns a yearly rent of ten marks on land he held in Dorsetshire, eight of which were to be spent on the nuns' clothing. The remaining money was to pay for a "pittance" or special treat of some kind on the holding of the *obits* of his mother Hawyse and his grandmother, Eve, that is, special prayers or services on the anniversaries of their deaths (Latin *obire*, to die). Providing a treat like an extra dish or glass of wine encouraged feelings of good will toward the benefactor and the relatives who were being remembered on those days. Pain's gift was confirmed by his brother Patrick in 1283 and—proof of the powers of remembering and preserving that monasteries possessed—the nuns of Godstow were still receiving these monies and saying prayers for Hawyse and Eve on the anniversaries of their deaths down to the year 1539, nearly 300 years later. Around the year 1250 (deed 556) John Pady of Oxford also made a gift toward the nuns' clothing expenses in the form of half of the yearly rent of a house he owned in the city, to the total of 6s 8d, which was to be collected in four installments of 20d each, namely, at Michaelmas, Christmas, Lady Day (the Annunciation), and Midsummer (i.e., September 29, December 25, March 25, and June 24). Gifts of rents were usually made in this way, in payments that were spaced out evenly over the year and corresponded with days when they fell due. This method allowed even well-wishers with very limited resources to be generous to a favorite local monastery. (We will return to the question of size of benefactions later.)

THE EVIDENCE

Visitation Records

The evidence for Godstow includes the usual visitation records, with their injunctions, threats, and reiterations of the same, from bishops and other clergy regarding the life of the community there.[13] The visitation records for Godstow include an account of a bishop's visit of

1191 (discussed in detail below); two letters dated 1284 and 1297 from the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, the first of which was a reissuing with modifications of the findings of an inquest held by his predecessor in the 1270s; letters of the Bishop of Lincoln (the diocese where Godstow was located) to the clergy of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, first excommunicating the men who abducted nuns from Godstow (July 1290), then (when he learned that the nuns were part of the scheme) a letter excommunicating the three nuns who had escaped and anyone who shelters them (July 1291); a full record of visitation drawn up by Bishop Grey in 1432 and a letter from him dated June 7, 1434 asking another cleric to check up on Godstow since he had heard reports that they had not mended their ways and he was not able to visit the nunnery himself; and finally, a visitation record for 1445 by Bishop Alnwick which more or less repeats Grey's injunctions of 1432.

As we have seen, for most houses minor infractions of the *Rule of St Benedict* must have been frequent, indeed customary. Certainly every known visitation at Godstow prompted corrective measures, as did most of those conducted by Eudes Rigaud over a twenty-one-year period in the archdiocese of Rouen. There were also occasional glaring scandals such as those uncovered by Bishop Alnwick in 1445 (discussed below), leading one historian to comment that "the general reputation of the house [was not] good at other periods."[14]

The Latin and English Registers

Other evidence that survives for this rather unremarkable monastic house has some remarkable features: its records include a *Register* of the nunnery, that is, a collection of the deeds of the lands, buildings, monies, and various privileges that Godstow possessed from grants received from its benefactors, kings and commoners alike, such as the gifts mentioned above from Royse la Moyne, Pain de Chaworth, and John Pady. (Also included were the "confirmations" of these, that is, when a king, pope, or the bishop passed away, monasteries often had his successor "confirm" their holdings, as a safeguard against others trying to claim them. This meant paying out money to have a new charter issued, recording the "confirmation.") Around 1400, Alice of Henley, the prioress, gathered together all the documents recording Godstow's endowments, gifts, and privileges. The resulting volume was the monastery's Latin *Register*, and around 1450 it was translated into English by a "poor brother and well-wisher" who was concerned about the monastery's welfare: he explains in the prologue to his translation that although the nuns were "in English books well learned" they were not able to read Latin easily, and thus could not protect their property and rights without help from learned men who

might not always be available to give advice.[15]

Godstow's English *Register* is the only complete English-language version of a medieval monastic cartulary that has come down to us, and probably one of the few English translations that were made of such materials in the Middle Ages; as such it is an important document in its own right in the history of the English language.[16] It contains over 900 deeds, grants, confirmation charters, as well as records of special arrangements: these include documents concerning *obits* (already mentioned), *corrodies* (grants made to Godstow from a benefactor in return for lodging that person in the monastery for the rest of his or her life, from Latin *conredare*, to outfit, provide with), and *chantries* (daily celebration of Mass for the benefactor's soul in perpetuity, from Latin *cantare*, to sing). The *Register* also includes documents concerning disputes between Godstow, its patrons, neighbors, officials, and others, which reveal its relations with the outside world. As we have seen, daily life in the monastery cannot be understood without consideration of such ties.

THE NUNNERY'S ROLE IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

The primary "job" of a monastic was, of course, to seek his or her own salvation and to pray. But not only were monasteries and the "world" bound together by multiple ties: nunneries in particular served a function in the secular world that few other institutions could. Women who desired an education, a life of scholarship and contemplation, or service to God had far fewer institutional options than men. Entrance into a nunnery provided a measure of independence, support, and a field in which to exercise executive and managerial talents (if one had them); and, since not everyone wanted to or could get married, respectable alternative living arrangements for the daughters of well-to-do families were needed. So much was this the case that nunneries grew financially dependent on the "dowry" or gift which came to the convent with the acceptance of each nun into the community. Such gifts could take many forms, in money, lands, houses, rents, and even price reductions on the same: c. 1258 (deed 6) Ralph Chendut and his wife Agnes sold land to Godstow at a bargain price, and Agnes's sister, Katherine, was made a nun in the monastery at the same time. The dowry system was a long-established practice at most nunneries, although the clergy condemned it because it conflicted with provisions of Benedict's Rule. Benedict had wanted the doors of the monastery to be open to all who wish to enter, and had ruled that the community should be "no respecter of persons," receiving free and unfree, high and low equally and without price. It should come as no surprise that some of the aspirations of a sixth-century charismatic holy man were difficult to

realize in monastic establishments of the high Middle Ages.

Like other nunneries, to make ends meet Godstow took in boarders and widows who needed lodgings and security—the medieval equivalent of a modern-day "assisted living" arrangement. As mentioned above, a corrody was an arrangement whereby an individual surrendered his or her land and goods (and the right to make a will) to Godstow in return for permission to lodge in the monastery and be supported there. For example, by a charter dated c. 1275 (deed 608) Alice Walton gave "to the abbess and to the Convent of the house of Godstow" an acre of meadow in return for a "chamber to dwell in" for the rest of her life. In 1291 (deed 652), Alice Southam gave a house in Oxford which she had inherited from her mother (thus, a family property) in return for "a corrody of one mynchon [nun] forever in the abbey of Godstow." The "corrody of one mynchon" was the grant of board and lodging equivalent to that of a nun, as opposed to a servant's corrody which gave the recipient the dress and food allowance of a servant. In 1287 the abbess and convent granted to Ralph Ben a corrody and a pension, namely, meat and drink as long as he lived in their house of Godstow and half a mark of silver per annum at two terms (half at Lady Day, half at Michaelmas); in return Ralph gave them a house in Bloxham and eight acres of arable, one-half acre of meadow, and one rod of land. In c. 1270 Richard son of William Green gave to Godstow five and one-half acres of arable and two rods of meadow in return for a yearly pension of 6s 8d and a corrody as a servant (specified as "service under the porter forever at the gate of Godstow") (deeds 314, 420). In addition to lodgings and religious services in the form of obits and chantries, some benefactors also arranged their burials in the conventual churchyard, as we shall see.

Nuns in a choir stall, fifteenth century. (British Library, London, UK/The Bridgeman Art Library)

Because nunneries provided a respectable career and the guarantee of an appropriate living standard for the women of well-to-do families, and because they were never dependent on a single benefactor, their inhabitants exercised more freedom of action than might generally be supposed.

GODSTOW IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Although historians are most familiar with the clerical view, in fact there was more than one opinion about what daily life should be like in communities like Godstow. The popes who confirmed its rights and privileges (and ordered strict enclosure for all female religious, as Pope Boniface VIII did in 1298), the bishops who censored or praised its members, the kings who were its most powerful patrons, the benefactors who favored it with gifts, the families whose daughters, mothers, sisters, nieces, and aunts entered the convent as nuns, and the people of the regions where Godstow owned property and had the right to collect monies, appoint priests to parish churches, and exercise the other usual rights of lordship, all had their own expectations. What are we to make of the steady stream of money, land, rents, and rights the nunnery received over a period of four centuries from this multitude of benefactors? Did the public think that the nuns' involvement in worldly affairs was "abominable"?

Priests and Other Clergy

It has always been easy to think about medieval monasteries

according to ideas of conformity and deviance because of the existence of the highly revered Benedictine Rule where, as we have seen, regulations for all aspects of daily life were spelled out in detail. We recall that the Rule emphasizes obedience "without delay" to the abbot, and the need to lead a life in common where all sleep and dine together and no one owns private possessions of any kind. The day is to be filled by manual labor, prayer, and sacred reading, and no one is to leave the monastery without permission. Infractions of these and other regulations were constant, indeed customary at Godstow, as demonstrated by the repetitive injunctions directed at the nuns from the 1270s to 1445; thus it might be better to think of the Rule as a kind of "flexible cage"[17]; in fact, it is hard to understand the survival of that *Rule* otherwise! Clergymen (especially powerful ones who exercised the right of visitation) may have thought that monastic corruption was prevalent, but large numbers of laymen and women did not agree with them. As the rest of this chapter will show, outsiders' opinions about Godstow and their involvement with it were crucial for the kind of life lived within its walls.

Saint Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln

One of the earliest recorded instances of a truly episcopal visitation (i.e., one not ordered by pope or king) to *any* English monastery happens to be the one made by Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, at Godstow in 1191. During that visit, as he approached the altar in the conventual church to pray, Hugh noticed a stone coffin covered with silk and surrounded by lit candles, clearly a local shrine of some importance, and he asked whose it was. The nuns told him it was the body of Rosamund, mistress of King Henry II (r. 1154–1189), who had retired to Godstow in 1176 when her affair with the king ended, and had died there, probably in that same year. A contemporary chronicle states that Henry "so loved Rosamond that out of his love for her house, which before was poor and in want, he gave many and great revenues and adorned it with noble buildings and conferred great revenues on the said church." Records of royal expenditures show money spent for shingles, timber, and various building costs at Godstow from 1176 to the end of Henry's life in 1189.[18] The king also paid for her tomb and made other gifts to Godstow so that the nuns would take care of it. The site had quickly become a local shrine and a source of income, in the form of visitors' offerings, to the community.

Bishop Hugh was outraged and ordered that her body be removed, saying that "she was a whore, for the king's affections to her were unlawful and adulterous," and that she should be buried outside of the church "with other common people, to the end that religion be not vilified and that other women might be terrified from such adulterous

practices." The nuns moved her coffin to the chapter house, where it remained quite visible (and literally in the center of monastery business) for some time. "At length her flesh being quite perished these chaste sisters put all her bones in a perfumed leather bag which bag they enclosed in lead and laid them again (with her stone coffin) in the church under a large grave stone." (In fact, Rosamund's remains were still bringing in donations from visitors 500 years later: in the 1660s, the bailiff of the lord who then owned the land told a visitor that he had moved the coffins of Rosamund and her father and mother, also buried at Godstow, from the churchyard to a little chapel that still stood on the former monastic grounds because he "thought it more commodious to him." The coffins now "being under lock and key, yields him many a 6d, which before did not.")[19]

Bishop Hugh clearly was not able to fully enforce his orders in 1191. His complaint touched upon a complicated issue: Rosamond had been placed at Godstow before her death by her lover, the King of England, who himself had died only two years before, in 1189, and whose son was now on the throne; further, she had died in the nunnery, and her tomb brought in much-needed revenues in the form of offerings from pilgrims. The most that Hugh could do was to issue his orders in "solemn and peremptory language"[20]—not the most effective weapon. This basic powerlessness of the clergy is equally apparent in the letter of 1284 which Archbishop John Peckham sent to the nuns concerning recent evil rumors he had heard:

> And know, if you, abbess, do not have [my] ordinances kept, we will apply such a penalty that you will feel it, according to the discipline of religion … know that if you do not have these things kept, you will find us more difficult in your business, if you happen to have need of us.[21]

Like Saint Hugh, Peckham could only hope that the nuns would do as they were ordered.

Ecclesiastical orders often failed to produce the desired results: Bishop Oliver Sutton in July 1290 excommunicated the men who had abducted Agnes of Sheen, a nun of Godstow who had been traveling on the King's highway and was (according to report) "dragged from the cart." But exactly one year later, in July of 1291, the bishop excommunicated Agnes and two other nuns (one of them a kinswoman of Ela the countess of Warwick) having learned that they were accomplices in the "abduction."[22] Bishop Gray's visit in 1432 (and the follow-up he arranged for 1434) resulted in a list of injunctions that were repeated, almost item for item, eleven years later when Bishop William Alnwick visited.[23] It seems that the official visitations, admonitions, and complaints fell on deaf ears. Indeed, so

typical was a lack of response to clerical criticism that when the nuns did listen, it was singled out for special notice: in a 1388 dispute over the rightful ownership of certain tithes between the monasteries of Oseney and Godstow, the two communities asked Bishop Bokyngham to mediate, and he proclaimed this fact in a charter (deed 494), making much of their submitting themselves to his judgment: They "submitted themselves purely and goodly and utterly to the bishop's ordaining, decree, and defining, promising … to have it said and [kept] forever what-so-ever he ordained, decreed, or defined in any way."

The tradition of episcopal visitation and injunction is a good example of what it means to have a right without the power to enforce it. Godstow was not dependent on the Pope, the archbishops, or the bishops for the necessities of life. The community's principal source of income was the fixed revenues it received as a landowner, gifts from the lay community, and the income from taking in boarders and granting corrodies. Even if the Church could have ensured regular episcopal visitation, bishops were unable to develop a systematic extension of their power: at Godstow and everywhere across Europe, local and traditional "interpretations" of the Rule persisted.

The Visitation of 1432

To draw aside the curtain and look inside the monastery at its daily activities, let us consider the evidence provided by the twenty-three injunctions issued by Bishop Gray after his visit to Godstow on July 16, 1432.

1) The nuns were to be present at the Divine Office.
2) At least twelve (of the sixteen at Godstow at that time) were to take their meals in the refectory, which should also be repaired.
3) Silence should be kept.
4) Strangers were to be brought by the gatekeeper straight into the abbess's hall and all conversation between visitors and nuns were to be heard by the abbess or her appointee, and only immediate relatives (parents, siblings) were to spend the night.
5) The gatekeeper was to swear to uphold these regulations.
6) The secular boarders and their "households" (i.e., servants, friends, hangers-on) were to be removed within one year because their clothes and visitors are disruptive and a bad example to the nuns.
7) The bailiff is to have no private conversation with any of the nuns since he told the bishop in his interview with him that "there is no good woman in the monastery."
8) No drinking after Compline.
9) Everyone is to sleep in the dormitory, and doors are to be closed

and opened according to the Rule.

10) No secular persons are to be received in the nuns' rooms upon pain of excommunication, "for the scholars of Oxford say that they can have all manner of recreation with the nuns, even as they will desire."
11) The infirmary is to be repaired.
12) Young nuns aren't to leave the cloister for the outer court without permission.
13) No nun is to go to Oxford or anywhere else without permission.
14) Nuns are not to talk to secular folk in the nave of the church or the chapels, but only in the abbess's hall.
15) All are to obey the abbess without distinction.
16) Lamps are to be left burning at night in the dormitory and cloister.
17) No secular person or cleric (such as the priests who serve the nunnery) is to enter the cloister precincts or the nuns' lodgings after Compline or before Prime (i.e., at night), and no man is to have any jurisdiction in the monastery (possibly aimed at the bailiff whose comment in #7 above suggests considerable familiarity).
18) Only officials of the monastery are to keep horses within its grounds.
19) The one hundred shillings kept in a chest to assist poor nuns are to be put back.
20) The doors of the nuns' living quarters that open to the outer court (which made it possible to enter into the cloister even if other doors are shut) are to be blocked up or barred so that secular folk cannot use them.
21) Students from Oxford are not to be admitted.
22) There are to be only three "households" (*familiae*) total in the monastery.
23) Finally, the gatekeeper and officials of the monastery are not to pass gifts, letters, or tokens between the nuns and the scholars of Oxford or anyone else, under pain of losing their office and expulsion from the monastery—and if any nun engages in such activity, she is to be imprisoned in the monastery for a year.

From these injunctions something may be inferred about the facts of daily life at Godstow, although (as we saw in Eudes's *Register*) we should not assume that every ruling reflects a real or frequent transgression or violation: one nun receiving an Oxford undergraduate in her room, leaving without permission, or talking to lay people in the church might generate an injunction. (Note that this list does not include any reference to the fact that one nun, Mary Browne, was

found to be pregnant at the time of Bishop Gray's visit, because the matter was dealt with separately. When Gray sent someone to check up on Godstow two years later, he specifically asked him to see whether Mary Browne had been preferred to any office or had gone outside the cloister or precincts of the monastery).

A central feature of daily life in Godstow, and other late medieval monasteries, seems to have been living in separate "households" (*familiae*) in the community (injunction #22), where residents did not take their meals in common but rather split up into separate groups for eating. At Godstow, one group ate with the abbess, another took its meals in the refectory, and a third in the sick ward. The practice itself may be related to the poverty of nunneries since it denotes the "disintegration of the claustral plan,"[24] one sign of which is that the refectory had fallen into disrepair (#2) (visitation records frequently note a dilapidation in the buildings intended for living the "common life," and on occasion visitors found that the vacant building was being used for another purpose altogether, like storing grain). That such a practice was becoming customary is suggested by the fact that the bishop did not declare the practice illegal, but merely limited the number of households to three. (Indeed, in the Eastern Church monks or nuns were allowed to live in small groups of three or four within a house [idiorhythmic monasticism], but in the Western Church this practice was generally considered to be an abuse of the cenobitic or "common life" mode of monasticism). Injunctions #2, 8, and 9 suggest that these groups were to a considerable degree truly living in separate households, taking meals together, drinking their evening glass of wine together, sleeping in private chambers, and receiving "secular persons" in their rooms instead of the "parlor" (no wonder the refectory and infirmary had fallen into disrepair). Such *familiae* were undoubtedly based on friendship or blood relationship; perhaps women of the same age or background, or who had entered at the same time, felt an affinity with each other. Frequently the abbess herself might have a particular circle of favorites, which could lead to bad feeling between the sisters.

When we add to this phenomenon the injunctions regarding absence from Divine Office, too much talking, a lax gatekeeper, disruptive boarders, failure to obey the abbess, and people "parking" their horses on monastic grounds (horses that perhaps belonged to the visitors who were not supposed to be there!), many might question whether anything like a religious life was observed at Godstow in 1432. Was it not "more like a laxly-kept ladies' boarding house than a nunnery," as has been suggested?[25] On a number of occasions clerical officials warned the nuns about the dangers of scandal, and complained about the rumors attached to the house. Bishop Gray, referring to the

convent's unwillingness to obey his injunctions of 1432, wrote:

> [B]y the report of common rumor and by loud whisperings, which cannot be concealed by any sort of turning away therefrom, it has very often come to our ears … that the abbess and convent, having loosed the bridle of obedience and slackened the reins of chastity, returning as dogs untamed to the lust and hateful vomit of their former life … holding up as it were to ridicule and sport such our ordinances, injunctions, and commands, have wholly and altogether with despite and derision omitted … to observe them one and all … recklessly incurring the penalties aforesaid to the grievous peril of their own souls, to the mischievous example of others, and to the open contempt and vilification of us and of our jurisdiction as bishop.[26]

The violations at Godstow are stereotypical: we find them or versions of them in the visitation records for scores of other late medieval monasteries. However, none of them proves that a religious life of personal devotion was impossible there; and as we saw in Eudes's *Register*, reports on many of the communities were a mix of good and bad—and houses with financial, organizational, or even "personnel" problems could still be declared "in good condition," in "temporals" and "spirituals." But did the "holy mynchons" have something to fear from "report" of their way of life becoming public knowledge? Let us turn now to ask what Godstow was, rather than what it was not.

GODSTOW AND THE WORLD "OUTSIDE" THE WALLS

Nuns were not the only people resident at Godstow: by the 1400s the community also housed about half a dozen corrodians, five or six priests, about a dozen servants and perhaps as many boarders. There were lay stewards who met frequently with the abbess concerning management of the monastery's properties, as well as a rent collector, and a gatekeeper who lived in the outer court. Construction workers also may have lodged there at times: a deed of c. 1275 (cited earlier) names one Alice Walton who is to receive "one chamber" to live in (in return for a grant of land) "which John Masun [Mason] first inhabited" (deed 608). This John Masun may have been a resident workman engaged on the construction of a four-foot thick enclosure wall built around part of the convent at this time.[27] (This citation also gives us a glimpse of Godstow as an employer of local labor.) Guests passing through had to be housed and fed, as Chapter 53 of the *Rule* decreed:

> All guests who come shall be received as though they were Christ:

> for He Himself said: I was a stranger and ye took Me in.… In the case of all guests arriving or departing: with inclined head, or with prostrating of the whole body upon the ground, Christ, who is also received in them, shall be adored.… Chiefly in the reception of the poor and of pilgrims shall care be most anxiously exhibited: for in them Christ is received the more.

(A spectacular instance of such monastic hospitality is found in the chronicles of Alnwick Abbey, Northumberland, where in 1376 the patron, Earl Henry Percy, dined with thirteen knights in the refectory, and 1,020 local parishioners ate in the cloisters!)[28] Thus we must imagine a constant flow of life from the outside into the abbey precincts and back out again, a flow that was normal, everyday, and unremarkable. The nuns would have had news of what was going on in the town, and would not have felt isolated from the currents of life outside. Conversely, lay folk would not have thought of Godstow as a place separate and apart, but as in the thick of local affairs.

The most ordinary details culled from the records reveal a concrete "interface," or common ground where the nunnery and the larger society interacted and influenced each other. For example, by virtue of a royal grant made by Empress Maud in 1142 (deed 873), the nuns of Godstow held an annual three-day fair (i.e., market) beginning on the feast of Saint John the Baptist (June 24), which was held on the lands of the abbey and brought in revenue to the community: vendors rented booths and paid sales taxes to the nuns, and fairgoers might visit the conventual church to make offerings of a couple of pence at one of the altars—and visit Rosamund's shrine. The Godstow market, serving local consumers and producers, also provided a convenient source for purchasing the nuns' food, clothing, wax, and other items.

Regular contact with the people just beyond the walls of the convent also occurred because, as noted earlier, the parish church of the neighborhood was part of the convent: we see this in a deed (#6) dated October 13, 1533, where abbess Margaret Tewksbury presents a candidate to be priest of that church to the Bishop of Lincoln, describing it as "situated next to our conventual church and connected to it." This arrangement caused problems, as revealed in the injunctions of 1445, one of which orders that seculars are to have no access to the nuns in the choir "in the time of divine service."[29] In fact, the text of one of the injunctions makes it clear that people other than the nuns themselves were present nearly everywhere within the monastery grounds: one of the nuns, Katherine Okeley, is reprimanded because she "talks to strangers in the church, chapter-house, at the church-door and the hall door and [various] other places."[30]

Other outsiders who had contact with the nuns were students from

Oxford University. When the students could not come to Godstow, the nuns would go to them: "Hence we condemn forever those sojourns which were wont to be made to the houses of friends [in Oxford] for the sake of pleasure and of escaping from discipline." Allowing students to come into Godstow had been condemned 150 years earlier, in Peckham's letter of 1284. Of course there were secular people even closer than Oxford undergraduates: the wealthy boarders who lived inside the convent, one of whom Bishop Gray ordered removed. Perhaps evidence of their "bad example" is preserved in Archbishop Peckham's order that the nuns wear simple dress and stop calling each other "domina" (lady, mistress), a practice which he declared was "utterly ridiculous."[31] The financial dependence of nunneries on wealthy boarders made it impossible to clear them out.

Another letter from the Archbishop, dated 1294, warns the nuns at Godstow of the dangers of visiting with men, especially "scholars, priests, and religious persons, since from them slander may much more lightly arise."[32] Six years later, three nuns are seen getting into a carriage and are excommunicated a year later for apostasy. Other nuns ran away in 1339, 1432, and 1445. The abbess and convent concealed the truth about the 1445 case during an episcopal visit: in June of that year, one week after visiting Godstow, Bishop Alnwick was inspecting Eynsham Abbey, one of whose monks was imprisoned there for running away in company with a nun of Godstow ("he has now been brought back to the monastery and is still doing penance"). The nun was Alice Langspee, who had been mentioned the week before at Godstow because of illicit conversations she had been having with a chaplain of Oxford,[33] but no one had spoken a word about the fact that shortly before she had been AWOL in company with a monk of Eynsham.

Scandals such as these are not numerous in Godstow's history, but the evidence for the existence of a built-in, indeed customary system that ran contrary to much of the Benedictine Rule is strong. Here, in Eudes Rigaud's Normandy, and everywhere, the tendency for local custom to take root and develop existed throughout the medieval period. It was inevitable that a sort of "unwritten body of customs … which carried with them relaxations on points of diet and discipline"[34] should develop at every monastery. In spite of the existence of the Rule and its venerability, there was more than one Benedictine "norm."

THE KING AND GODSTOW

Godstow became a royal abbey in 1180 and remained under royal patronage until its end. Patrons of monasteries gave their houses gifts and provided them with legal protection when needed, and received

in return certain privileges, such as lodging there if they happened to be in the neighborhood, and installing female relatives and friends as nuns. A patron also had the right of custody during a vacancy, that is, the right to collect all revenues of the house in the time between the death of the abbess and the appointment of her successor. Further, the patron granted permission to elect a new abbess and approved the person selected, a requirement that preserved his or her rights and contributed to a public "image" as a power broker in medieval society. In short, patrons could interfere in internal affairs for numerous reasons and often did, especially if they were otherwise people of power.

As we have seen, the nunnery achieved an early notoriety when Henry II settled Rosamund, his young but ailing mistress, at Godstow in 1176 and then ordered that she be buried there after she died. Indeed, Henry probably refounded the nunnery as a royal abbey around the year 1180, under the direct patronage and protection of the Crown, and gave it additional lands and rents, because of "the shelter it gave, in life and death, to Fair Rosamund."[35] Permitting a royal mistress to take refuge in one's monastery could be advantageous: the nuns themselves in 1191 specifically told Bishop Hugh during his visit that "the king had done many great benefits" to Godstow for the sake of his "friend," Rosamund.

One of the "benefits" Henry bestowed on the convent (deed 884) was the right not to be sued over any lands that it possessed except "before him or his Justices," that is, in the king's court. Other benefits might be more humble and domestic in character: in 1341 (deed 739) Edward III, great-great-great grandson of Henry II, granted to Abbess Maud of Beauchamp, for the term of her life, "three carts of faggots weekly to be delivered by the foresters." Godstow also appealed to the king for protection of its lands and revenues from lay people: in 1412 (deeds 802, 803) Abbess Elizabeth Felmersham complained to Henry IV that her convent had been dispossessed of land in Warwickshire, and he ordered the sheriff and two commissioners to inquire into the matter. In fact the king as patron had other special "powers of interference"[36] in affairs at Godstow: in 1316, the financial state of the house was so bad that the abbess asked Edward II to take the convent under his direct protection. He appointed two ecclesiastical custodians as temporary financial managers, during which time the nuns were paid a certain living allowance out of Godstow's revenues and the remainder was applied to discharging its debts. Nineteen years later, in 1335, the nuns were allowed to keep the profits during a vacancy by order of Edward III "because of its poverty and misfortunes."[37]

But relations between Godstow and its royal patron also involved

disputes over land or the nuns' violation of some customary rights belonging to the king. In 1281 Edward I ordered the sheriff to arrest the abbess and produce her before him at the next Parliament because she had appropriated lands not belonging to the nunnery, possibly sixty acres of the king's demesne.[38] In 1285 the abbess appeared before the royal Justices on the charge of having raised a water mill on the king's lands near Oxford.[39] In 1306 (deed 857) Edward I ordered the sheriff of Wiltshire to call the abbess to court and answer the charge of stopping up a branch of the Thames and flooding lands belonging to Queen Margaret at Latton. (The abbess denied the charge, claimed that the lands were rightfully hers, and said that the inundation had been caused by stepping stones that had been there "of olden time" and the case was dropped). In 1306 (deed 179) Edward I pardoned Godstow for acquiring land in violation of a statute (the Statute of Mortmain of 1279), which forbade the transfer of land to ecclesiastical ownership without license by the king and the chief of whom the land was held. If the nuns hoped to maintain their standard of living, they had to retain the favor of their patron. Their dependence only increased over time, given the ravages of the plague (during which Godstow lost its abbess and half the population of the convent) and the economic disruption that followed.

GODSTOW'S EVERYDAY BENEFACTORS

The evidence of the *Register* paints a different picture of Godstow from the one provided by visitation records, and reveals the range of criteria according to which the nunnery was evaluated. Connections between the community and the outside world were complex and in a state of constant change. Beginning with the endowments made at its foundation in the 1130s, and ending with the last gifts that were being made c. 1460 (only eighty years before the Dissolution), the flow of steady, mostly modest, gifts to Godstow stretches across more than three centuries, just as they did at Cluny. How did the nuns maintain the loyalty and interest of hundreds of people over such an immense amount of time?

For one thing Godstow played a part in accommodating, even fostering, family bonds, as seen in the instances of friends and relations of local families entering the convent as nuns, sometimes even together. Around 1160 (deed 32) Vincent, lord of Wytham confirmed his father's earlier gift to Godstow which he had given with his three daughters (Vincent's sisters) at the time of the nunnery's foundation, and in his turn Vincent gave the nuns five acres of meadow ("of his own inheritance") as a "dower" for his own two daughters. A deed of c. 1154 (deed 232) records a grant of land to Godstow made by Richard Labaanc at the same time that his mother

Rohays and his sister Cecilie became nuns there, with the further provision that he was to be buried there after his death (according to the language of the charter, he "granted to the same church his body to be buried after his death"). Thus, Lady Edith, the foundress, and her daughters Emma and Havis, who all three entered Godstow at its inception, were simply the first in a number of joint family professions there. Having prayers said by the nuns for one's deceased parents or other relatives also fostered family bonds, creating a relationship with the community through time—and we have seen that monasteries had long memories indeed.

Godstow was in the view of many a desirable place to live. It *had* to be if it were to attract paying boarders and women who would enter as nuns and bring "dowries" with them. Its regular daily routine, access to an education and opportunities to teach, the conveniently located church, ability to handle overflow and house guests, regular delivery of stores, nearness of a market (the Godstow fair), the quiet atmosphere (and perhaps proximity to Oxford?) were features which would recommend it to women interested in the monastic life, their families, and to others, especially older people. Potential corrodians would also be on the lookout for a variety of desirable features, some merely interested in a comfortable residence, others hoping to combine light employment with live-in accommodations, as we have seen Richard Green did around 1270, giving Godstow six acres of arable and meadow in return for the office of subporter at Godstow, plus lodgings and a yearly pension of 6s 8d.

Relations with the people of Oxford could involve disputes as well as benefactions, disputes that occurred only because the monastery had so many interests in and links to the larger community. These disagreements were settled in the same tribunals frequented by other landholders, and Godstow was treated in the main like any other party to a case. The site of the convent was just inside the territorial jurisdiction of Oxford, and there are various complaints about the "abbess and her convent of holy mynchons"[40] taking over lands that did not belong to them. In 1397 (deed 320) Godstow accused fourteen men of Bloxham of dispossessing it of a messuage (a house), and though the royal justices decided in favor of the nuns, the convent had to pay a fine to eleven of the fourteen people accused who had been found innocent. Godstow did not always fulfill its responsibilities to provide priests for the churches it held. In 1374 a special license was granted by Bishop Bokyngham (deed 65) to a group of parishioners to hire their own chaplain themselves, since Godstow had either failed to do so, or had appointed someone who was inadequate or unreliable: the charter specifies they want a "convenient chaplain," which could mean either someone who was suitable or someone who would show

up when required—or both. This is a failure to fulfill a duty as a holder of land, and does not necessarily reflect disapproval for internal affairs within the convent.

Spiritual Benefits and Family Ties

We have seen that the prayers of monastic communities were widely believed to be effective in gaining God's favor, improving one's chances of salvation, and lessening the amount of time one might have to spend in Purgatory after death. Nuns' prayers were thought by many to have a kind of power that monks' prayers did not, even though women could not be priests, because Jesus's mother was a mortal woman and he had appeared first to a woman, Mary Magdalene, after the Resurrection. These beliefs gave rise to a common desire for special intercessory services for one's soul and the souls of loved ones that brought many kinds of gifts to monastic communities. One popular form was to pay for "lights" (i.e., lamps or candles) in the church: in about 1270 (deed 815) Pers le Notte gave Godstow "for the health of his soul" one half of a burgage (an urban property) to pay for a candle in the church of Godstow ("for the sustaining of a light in wax before the cross in the choir of the monastery of Godstow"). The regular rents Godstow received from gifts of property like this made such benefactions a lasting gift. Around 1180 Agnes daughter of Pain son of John gave all the revenues of a church on her land in the town of Dinton "to the sustaining of sick mynchons of the infirmary" (deed 52). In the same period the widow Margery Cressy gave "for God's sake and for the health of her soul and of the souls of her mother and father and of her ancestors and successors" five cartloads of wood every year fifteen days after the feast of Saint Michael "to dry their herring" (deed 862). The specific nature of such gifts suggests that the needs or deficiencies of the community could be common knowledge outside its walls.

Some benefactors contributed to a program of active charity under Godstow's stewardship which fostered its good standing in the community: around 1300 (deed 475) John Veiscele established an obit for himself by making a generous grant to Godstow of twenty-four acres in land, a house, and other properties "for the health of his soul and of Isabelle his wife and for the souls of his father and of his mother and of his children." In addition the "holy mynchons of Godstow" were to "feed thirteen poor men" every year on the anniversary of his death, a service that was faithfully rendered there for the next two and a half centuries, until the community itself was dismantled in 1539. People who trusted Godstow to perform their final acts of benevolence appear to have chosen wisely.

Family associations are also evident in a c.1250 deed (deed 635) in

which Peter Pille confirms a bequest his mother Agnes had made to Godstow, when she was a widow, for a pittance on her anniversary. His mother now being dead, the son is honoring her intention by confirming the gift of ten shillings of rent on land in Oxford. Around 1220 Adam Walder established a chantry for himself, his wife Alyne, and their son Adam and his wife Agnes by giving Godstow a house in the town of Wycombe (Buckinghamshire) that his father "used to dwell in," along with a tenement, six other properties, two booths in the Wycombe market, twenty shillings worth of rent from eleven different holdings, and of course a pittance on the anniversary of his death. In return Godstow was to find a priest who would be lodged, fed, and clothed at the nuns' expense in Wycombe, who would say daily Mass for Adam and his family in the church there; and should that priest fall sick, or when he died and the nuns were looking for his successor, the daily chantry Mass was to be said by the priest in the church at Godstow itself. One is struck by the level of micromanagement on the part of the donor, his concern for absolutely uninterrupted Masses, and his trust that the community at Godstow could and would fulfill all the obligations of this arrangement.

Other benefactions preserved in the *Register* attest to the good reputation of the monastery and the importance of family associations. Around the year 1165 a woman whose husband was still living entered the community to become a nun (deed 25), a fairly infrequent occurrence in general: William of Sewkeworth and his wife (unnamed) gave Godstow the tithes of two mills and five acres of meadow as a "nun's dower" for his wife whom he "gives" to the nuns "to serve God." Further, he, his wife, and their son Turstyne gave Godstow a church and other lands, the charter specifying that the gift was made "by his own consent and moving of himself, and of his wife" and their son. We see striking evidence (elsewhere) of the power of family associations in the burial arrangements made by Maud de Ros, who died c. 1316: she requested that her body be buried in Pentney Priory (Norfolk), a house patronized by her family, and that her bowels be buried in Belvoir Priory (Lincolnshire), a house patronized by her husband's family.[41] Such cases as these show vividly how a family's history could attach itself to a specific monastery over time.

The evidence of the *Register* paints a picture of a community that was highly engaged in local society over many generations as a landholder, an employer and a hostel-keeper, a site of pilgrimage (Rosamund's tomb), an appointer of clergy, a wielder of legal rights and possessor of a market, a consumer of goods and a source of spiritual benefits, a dispenser of charity, and a community. One cannot understand daily life at Godstow without this larger picture. Monasteries had staying power, as we have noted before: they were,

for medieval people, among the most familiar local landmarks. The benefits conferred on Godstow depended on its reputation, on maintaining a level of private and public trust that could withstand the occasional scandal of a pregnant nun, or the rumors circulating among Oxford undergraduates about easy access to willing nuns. (After all, the injunctions do not state that the Divine Office is being *entirely* neglected, but rather that not *all* of the nuns are in *regular* attendance.) People knew what was going on inside the monastery, and overall it met with their approval, for who would give to an unsatisfactory house, one that might not keep its agreements to say daily prayers? They undoubtedly also understood that if affairs in a community were going poorly in the present, they were sure to improve in the future—in other words, they had an immediate, living sense of the monastery in time, over the long haul, which the modern historian does not. The decline in benefactions that did occur after 1350 happened to monastic houses everywhere, and was a direct result of the massive mortality of the period, declining incomes, and changes in fashion in terms of testamentary practice (which we know was affected by the plague elsewhere).[42] There is no evidence of disapproval of the "moral" state of affairs at Godstow, as the medieval clergy (and some modern historians) have suggested.

LIFE INSIDE THE NUNNERY

With an understanding of this larger historical context, we turn now to the nuns themselves. How did they react to a visitation system geared to maintaining orderly routine and conformity outlined by the *Rule* and reiterated by the authorities? Did they "believe" in the values associated with monastic life? Some of the deeds from the *Register* strongly suggest that they did: in several cases the abbess gave Godstow a gift to establish her own obit, or special prayers for her soul to be said each year on the anniversary of her death. Thus, according to a deed of 1294 (deed 659), abbess Mabel Wafre (1284–1294) provided for her obit (just in time, for she died later that year) in the form of a rent charge, that is, the right to receive the rent from a tenement in the city of Oxford. Margery Dyne, abbess from 1318 to 1332, purchased property to give to the monastery to establish obits for herself, the prioress, and several outside benefactors of Godstow. Similarly, a desire to participate in the spiritual benefits provided by the abbey is found among some of the priests associated with Godstow who also made bequests (deeds 373, 375) to establish obits to be said for them by the community they had served. Many of these commitments, as we have seen, were still being honored right up to the end.

Why did the convent at Godstow neglect to regularly observe some of

the most important regulations of the Benedictine Rule? Much of the answer lies in the fact of change to which monasteries, as part of the very fabric of society, were clearly not immune. Godstow in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a long way away in every respect from the rustic hermitage that Benedict founded on Monte Cassino, nearly 1000 years earlier. Late medieval plague and famine undermined the financial stability that was always precarious for smaller houses. Landholders of all sorts, anyone who lived off of rents, suffered from the drop in population and increase in the cost of labor in the post-plague era. The nuns who ignored or flouted the rules at Godstow were to some degree simply conforming to the gradual modifications of standards, bringing them into conflict with the Church's official stance and an ideal of monastic discipline embodied in a document for which the medieval clergy had tremendous respect, Saint Benedict's *Rule*.

The nuns themselves were women mostly recruited from wealthy families (in spite of the presence of a "poor box" at Godstow). In some ways their background was not the best preparation for a life of asceticism, sacred reading, and prayer. The lifestyle and amusements of the baronial class correspond closely with the activities of Godstow's "deviants." The love of dress, games, and travel were prominent features of the "lifestyle" of well-to-do people.[43] We recall that Archbishop Peckham excoriated the nuns for using honorific titles among themselves, calling each other "lady" or "dame"; and in 1432 Bishop Gray ordered that one of the boarders "with her whole household, and other women of mature age be utterly removed from the monastery within one year next to come, seeing that they are a cause of disturbance to the nuns and an occasion of bad example by reason of their attire and those who come to visit them." (We saw in Chapter One that "forty rebel nuns and assorted thugs" attacked the nunnery of Holy Cross in Poitiers in the late sixth century, led by a royal inmate who objected to kitchen work!) Holding the position of abbess or prioress was an honorable one and clearly required administrative and leadership skills which women from such families were accustomed to exercising. In a premodern economy, where nearly all that was used and consumed had to undergo some preparation on site, the tasks of supervising servants, ordering supplies, and feeding a household of family members, servants, retainers, and hangers-on called for advanced management skills. Such women managed—and occasionally defended—vast family estates when their husbands were away, at court or on crusade, and had a recognized legal position "in all matters of private law."[44] Many of Godstow's members grew up in households such as this—and some of them took their habits, their expectations, and their love of

responsibility and power with them when they entered there.

GODSTOW'S LAST DAYS

When the English king proclaimed himself head of the Church in a state-engineered Reformation, the nearly 1,000 monasteries of England, Wales, and Ireland were doomed. Institutions that had seemed fixtures in the landscape vanished almost overnight, and their inmates were compelled to relocate.

> In the course of those four years [1536–1540] some 9,000 religious, plus an unknown number of lay attendants and servants, were uprooted from home and function. Some, especially the younger and more recent recruits, are known to have welcomed the change, but there is no reason to think that to the vast majority it was anything but hateful and terrible.[45]

Ruins of Godstow Abbey. (Ian Ilott/iStockphoto.com)

Nunneries were especially vulnerable as the wheels of the Dissolution began to turn, because the smallest and poorest houses were targeted first. In 1536 an act was passed to "suppress" (i.e., take into the king's hands) the "lesser monasteries," defined as houses with an annual income under £200. The heads were granted a pension for life, and other members were given the choice to leave the religious life with a pension (some of these monks and nuns survived into extreme old age right into the seventeenth century), or transfer to one of the larger still

existing houses. Given the choice to leave the monastic life or be transferred to another house, most nuns chose the latter: out of a total of roughly 900 women, only 100 chose to renounce their vows in 1536–1537.[46]

In 1539 Katherine Bulkeley, the last abbess of Godstow, wrote to the Lord Privy Seal a few months before the dismantling of the nunnery. As a statement from the head of a religious house, we could read this letter and some of the views she espouses as evidence of the "decline" and "decay" of late medieval religion—or as a desperate attempt to save an ancient community.

> For your lordship shall be well assured that there is neither Pope nor Purgatory, Image nor Pilgrimage, nor praying to dead saints, used or regarded amongst us.… Not doubting but this garment and fashion of life [i.e., monastic] does nothing toward our justifying before God.[47]

Nuns and monks in numerous communities did try to stave off destruction: the head of Amesbury Priory, Florence Bonnew, resigned before her house was dissolved, declaring "if the king's highness command me to go from this house, I will gladly go, though I beg my bread; as for pension, I care for none" (and she got none). The abbess and nuns of Shaftesbury offered to pay the king 500 marks, with £1,000 thrown in for Cromwell to save their house.[48] Nor was it clear to contemporaries, even once the dissolution had begun, that it was going to bring down *every* monastery: as late as 1538–1539, the sacristan at Glastonbury Abbey made payments for new stained glass windows, repair to liturgical vestments, the building of a new gate in the chapel, and the mending of church plate. There is something painful in the story of the monks of Winchester who "thrust a copy of their house's early history (from 604) upon Thomas Cromwell as justification of the convent's right to remain alive."[49]

Occasionally the royal commissioners themselves might plead for the preservation of a house, as in the case of Catesby Priory (Northamptonshire), a Cistercian nunnery which they said "was in very perfect order, the prioress a sure, wise, discreet, and very religious woman, with 9 nuns under her obedience as religious and devout and with as good obedience as we have in time past seen or probably shall see."[50] In 1536 the commissioners visiting Polesworth Abbey (Warwickshire) wrote a letter to Cromwell, in which they described the abbess and twelve nuns in glowing terms, stated that none of them would "leave or forsake their habit and religion," and noted the nunnery's importance to the local community through the school that it operated and the number of people it employed: for a £50 fee, Polesworth was allowed to continue in existence until 1539.

A powerful patron might also be able to delay the final blow to a favorite house, as did the duke and duchess of Norfolk, who actively campaigned for the survival of Thetford Priory, even giving possessions to it from Castle Acre Priory, a house which they had received from Henry VIII when it was dissolved in 1537. Indeed the monks of Thetford may have helped in the actual "deconstruction" of Castle Acre, since they rescued the priory's most prized relic, the arm of Saint Philip, which they took back to Thetford with them. But even the protection of a duke (and the arm of Saint Philip) was not enough to side-step the inevitable, and Thetford was suppressed in February 1540.[51]

There were many beneficiaries of this "confiscation" of the savings of medieval piety, from Henry VIII himself, whose income from the sale of monastic lands alone between 1540 and 1547 (the year of his death) was some £1,400,000 (at a time when £100 had the buying power of about $60,000 current U.S. dollars), to small winners, like John Pakyngton who wanted to lease Westwood Priory (Worcestershire) because "it is close to my house, where I have no pasturage for my horses."[52] And what of the women turned out of their communities? Recent research suggests that many of them did not marry; in fact some lived in communal households with other former nuns, often in the family residence of one of them.[53] Such doomed efforts to preserve their way of life remind us that monasteries were not good or bad, true or untrue to their own traditions (contemporaries can make those judgments, but twenty first-century people should not): they were merely always changing. Further, if there was a decline in the "communal character of cloistered life" in late medieval monasteries, as seen in this book, this does not necessarily mean a decline in the "fraternal bond between the brethren" or a decline in the "monastic traditions" of prayer, reading, scholarship[54]—and friendship.

After its dissolution Godstow Abbey was converted into a private residence, "Godstow House," and was occupied as such until the middle of the seventeenth century when it was damaged during the English Civil War. According to the antiquarian who visited Godstow in 1690 and talked to Jeffreys (whom we met earlier), who "keeps the keys of this ruinous place," there was still standing a little chapel dedicated to Saint Leonard. In its east window there was a picture of the saint with two abbesses, one on each side of him, with scrolls flowing out of their mouths on which were written the words *Sainte Leonard ora pro nobis* ("Saint Leonard pray for us"), and on the bottom the inscription "pray for the good of Margaret Tewkesbury and Elizabeth Branton abbesses of this place."[55] The western tower of the conventual church was blown down in a severe windstorm in 1764. In

the years that followed, the broken stone was used to build roads, sheds, and enclosures for cattle.[56]

The story of women's monasticism seems to be fraught with limitations of all sorts, especially in comparison with men's monastic experience. As a group, the clergy had always taken a rather dim view of women's ability to lead this most arduous way of life, and concern about nuns outside the convent and in contact with secular persons increased over time. In a papal bull issued in 1298, Pope Boniface VIII ordered strict enclosure specifically for all nuns (not all monastics) everywhere and forever: they were to "remain perpetually cloistered in their monasteries," "wholly separated from the public and worldly gaze," in the hope that "occasions for lasciviousness having been removed" they might "diligently safeguard their hearts and bodies in complete chastity."

Yet within the cloister, in sometimes very self-conscious and deliberate ways, women carved out for themselves spheres of activity that formal ecclesiastical institutions denied them. It is true that women could not say mass, that nuns were not supposed to touch the chalice that held the sacramental wine, burn incense, or approach the altar during Mass; abbesses were not to preach in public, hear confession, bless the nuns, or validate a nun's vows when she entered the monastery.[57] But the evidence yields up glimpses of the powers women could enjoy in their communities (which, like so many others kinds of communities in the Middle Ages, ecclesiastical and secular, enjoyed considerable powers of daily self-government): we hear of nuns described as chaplains in England,[58] and of a thirteenth-century Spanish nunnery where the women heard each other's confessions. Christina of Markyate, the twelfth-century English abbess, is pictured in priestly terms by her biographer (a monk of nearby Saint Albans Abbey) when she, like a priest, blessed a cup of drinking water and gave it to an epileptic who was cured. She herself was also cured of an illness when a host of angels placed on her head a crown which had "two white fillets [bands] like those of a bishop's mitre"; and she appeared standing near the altar to a monastic friend and well-wisher while he was celebrating Mass one day, a sight that astonished him for "it was hardly possible that any woman would be allowed to approach the altar."[59] We recall Eudes Rigaud in 1253 during his visitation of the nunnery of Saint-Saëns noting that a nun was assisting the priest at Mass. Finally, historians have yet to uncover fully the story of women as scholars, teachers, and contemplatives, as seen in the lives of Hrotsvitha and Hildegard of Bingen.

It is important that the historian also consider what could be called "quality of life" issues when thinking of communities like Godstow. Women with a sense of "vocation" (Latin *vocare* to call, to summon, to

invite), who answered a "call" to the monastic life, like the modern nuns cited in the Introduction, must have had a sense of positive self-regard, in spite of negative clerical comment—and of course clerical comment was often positive! When he visited the nunnery at Villarceaux where the nuns continued to make fancy needle-cases and laces as presents, the roofs of the buildings needed repair, and there were six nuns absent at the time of his visit because the prioress was too lenient, Eudes was able to report that "with God's grace we found their spiritual condition to be good."

NOTES

1. For the figures in this paragraph see Kathleen Cooke, "The English Nunneries and the Dissolution," in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 287–301.

2. Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters-in-Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 4–5.

3. This poem is available online at http://www.sfsu.edu/~medieval/complaintlit/nun.html.

4. Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 24.

5. *The English Register of Godstow Nunnery*, Andrew Clark, ed. (London: Early English Text Society, 1911), vol. 42, p. xxxii.

6. The discussion that follows draws on Gilchrist, *Gender*, Chapter 3, pp. 63–91; and Roberta Gilchrist, "The Archaeology of Medieval English Nunneries: A Research Design," in *The Archaeology of Rural Monasteries*, ed. Roberta Gilchrist and Harold Mytum (Oxford: BAR British Series 203, 1989), pp. 251–60.

7. Gilchrist, *Gender*, pp. 49–50.

8. Gilchrist, *Gender*, p. 63.

9. Gilchrist, "Archaeology," p. 257.

10. Gilchrist, *Gender*, p. 19.

11. Evidence regarding the foundation legend and early history are in deeds nos. 2, 3, & 5 in the *English Register*, described in more detail below. Deed numbers are given in parentheses; English has been modernized.

12. David Ganz, "The Buildings of Godstow Nunnery," *Oxoniensia* 37 (1972): 150–7.

13. Clark, *English Register*, nos. 129, 130, 142; *The Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton, 1280–1299*, Rosalind Hill, ed. (Hereford: Lincoln Record Society, 1954); *Registrum Epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham, Archiespiscopi Cantuariensis, 1279–1292*, C. Trice Martin, ed. (reprint; New York: Kraus, 1965); *Oxford City Documents, Financial and Judicial, 1268–1665*, J. E. Thorold Rogers, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891); *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1420–1449*, A. Hamilton Thompson, ed. (Horncastle: W. K. Morton, 1914–1929), 3 vols.

14. Eileen Power, *English Medieval Nunneries, c. 1275–1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 288. Power exemplifies the historian's tendency to judge women's houses more narrowly than men's: in a discussion of houses that have little by way of written evidence, she comments "Happy the nunnery that has no history," p. 473.

15. Clark, *English Register*, vols. 129, 130 & 142; vol. 129, deed no. 1.

16. According to its editor, Andrew Clark, the *English Register* "stands by itself, in its

own age, as an attempt, deliberately begun and carried right through to the finish, to shake off the fetters of Latin and use English speech for English folk in the management of English land," p. xiv.

17. A "flexible cage" is Carlo Ginzburg's phrase for "culture" in general, but it is also a good term for describing particular manifestations of culture, such as monasticism. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. xxi.

18. Ganz, "Buildings," pp. 150–1.

19. The historian in question, from whom this account is taken, was Anthony Wood, a seventeenth-century antiquarian who collected and preserved numerous documents concerning the history of Oxford and reconstructed much of the history of the town and its region, including Godstow. See *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632–1695, Described by Himself*, Andrew Clark, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), vol. I, p. 342. Wood's complete account of Godstow history is on pp. 338–46, including a drawing of the nunnery which he made in 1666. The story of Rosamund's remains is given on p. 345.

20. Thompson, *Visitations*, vol. III, pp. lxi–lxii.

21. Martin, *Registrum Epistolarum*, vol. III, pp. 993–4.

22. Hill, *The Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton*, vol. III, pp. 22–3, 132–3.

23. Thompson, *Visitations*, vol. II, pp. 115–16.

24. Gilchrist, "Archaeology," p. 256.

25. Clark, *English Register*, p. xciii.

26. Thompson, *Visitations*, vol. I, p. 65.

27. Ganz, "Buildings," p. 151.

28. Cited in Karen Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300–1540* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), p. 75.

29. Thompson, *Visitations*, vol. II, p. 115.

30. Thompson, *Visitations*, p. 114.

31. Martin, *Registrum Epistolarum*, vol. III, p. 845.

32. Martin, *Registrum Epistolarum*, pp. 993–4.

33. Thompson, *Visitations*, vol. III, pp. 22–3; vol. II, pp. 91, 114, respectively.

34. David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), p. 174.

35. Clark, *English Register*, p. xxxvi.

36. Susan Wood, *English Monasteries and their Patrons in the Thirteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 96.

37. *Victoria History of the County of Oxford*, H. E. Salter, L. F. Salzman, William Page, M. D. Lobel, and Alan Crossley, eds. (Folkestone, Kent: Institute of Historical Research, 1907), p. 73.

38. Salter et al., *Victoria History of the County of Oxford*, pp. 72–3.

39. Thorold Rogers, *Oxford City Documents*, p. 187.

40. Thorold Rogers, *Oxford City Document*, p. 184.

41. Cited in Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries*, pp. 140n186.

42. Samuel Cohn, *The Black Death and the Cult of Remembrance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

43. Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Baronial Household of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1965), p. 129.

44. Labarge, *A Baronial Household*, p. 40.

45. G. R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation, England 1509–1558* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 241.

46. Cooke, "The English Nunneries," p. 294.

47. Henry Ellis, ed. *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* (London: R. Bentley, 1846), vol. III, pp. 233–4.

48. These two cases are cited in Cooke, “The English Nunneries,” pp. 296–7.

49. These two stories are cited in Julian M. Luxford, *The Art and Architecture of English Benedictine Monasteries, 1300–1540* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 100 & 145.

50. Cited in Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries*, pp. 57 note 266 (spelling modernized).

51. Polesworth and Thetford are discussed in Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries*, pp. 180 & 295, respectively.

52. The currency equivalent given here comes from an online calculating tool called “Frink.” John Pakyngton is cited in Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries*, p. 49.

53. Cooke, “The English Nunneries,” p. 300.

54. James G. Clark, ed., *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p. 8.

55. Ganz, “Buildings,” pp. 152–3.

56. Godstow achieved another kind of fame centuries later, as a spot along the river where Lewis Carroll went boating with Alice Liddell, the original Alice in Wonderland.

57. Gilchrist, “Archaeology,” p. 253.

58. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 68.

59. *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, C. H. Talbot, ed. & trans. (reprint; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 119–20, 129 & 177, respectively.

6

MONKS AND PEASANTS

Students of medieval history in general and the medieval monastery in particular can never allow farming and farmers to venture far from their sight. As has been emphasized in the present book, monasteries were from the start agricultural enterprises: the monasteries established by Saint Pachomius along the Nile, some of which housed several thousand monks and nuns, were in effect self-sufficient "monastic villages"; Saint Anthony himself, the father of monasticism (and the son of prosperous peasants, who gave up a family farm of 300 acres when he renounced the world), demonstrates the interest and ingenuity of any farmer in one of his many removes further into the desert to escape his admirers: coming once to a high hill where there was sweet drinking water, good flat land, and a few wild date palms, he "fell in love with the place" (rather strong emotional language for his biographer to use about Anthony, who was after all an austere, even severe person). He asked some of his followers to bring him a hoe, axe, and seed, and clearing a small patch above the hill he tilled and sowed it and thus had bread, and later even grew vegetables so that those who visited him "might have some little refreshment after the weariness of that hard road." He rejoiced in his independence, "being glad that he should trouble no one on this account, but in all things kept himself from being a burden." He also dealt effectively with the age-old farming nuisance of stray animals who damaged his crops and garden in their search for water: "catching one of the beasts [he] said graciously to all, 'Why do you harm me when I do not harm you? Begone, and in the name of the Lord do not come near these things again.' And thereafter, as though fearing his command, they did not approach the place."[1]

Canterbury Cathedral Priory, Ramsey Abbey, Thorney Abbey, Fountains Abbey, and some of their holdings in the Middle Ages. (University of Connecticut Libraries Map and Geographic Information Center [MAGIC])

Enduring associations between monks and peasants gave rise to similarities in their ways of life, as has also been seen frequently in these pages. Thus, the brothers who lived at Monte Cassino in the early days with Saint Benedict himself included laborers and even escaped slaves, and the hardships of their daily life there mirrored those of the early medieval peasantry: physical labor, moderate rations, rising at daybreak, going to bed with the sun. As cited in Chapter Two, in his *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, Bede

painted a picture of Eosterwine, the perfect abbot, who excelled in the arts of the farmer and "identified himself so completely with his brethren that he took a positive delight in sharing their ordinary work," threshing, milking the ewes and cows, laboring in bake house, garden and kitchen, and "putting his hand to the plough along the furrow, hammering iron into shape or wielding the winnowing-fan"[2] (i.e., separating the chaff or husks from the seed). Bede's story of Cuthbert and the peasants on the banks of the Tyne River, recounted in Chapter Three, preserved evidence of an early medieval pagan–Christian frontier, where monks lived among the peasants, found ways to communicate with them, and did most of the missionary work among them. In the process of the conversion, monk-missionaries and peasants together found and created a common ground and made of Europe a Christian civilization.

As seen in Chapter Two, from its foundation Cluny's well-wishers were often people of humble means who gave land, usually in small parcels, which the monastic administration built up into larger estates by deliberate purchase and exchange with other land holders. To make that land valuable and productive, to bring it into the necessary flow of goods and services that made the Cluny success-story possible, such new acquisitions and aggregations were often leased to peasant farmers to improve and cultivate, and the property might then be divided, usually equally, between the abbey and the tenant. Thus, like most monasteries, Cluny had peasant tenants from the very start, and this gave rise to a long-term relationship between monk and peasant based on land, labor, mutual obligation, and a working knowledge of each other. The rural granges or estates, so often glimpsed in the pages of Eudes Rigaud's *Register*, small cells inhabited by perhaps two or three monks and a few peasant lay brothers, were centers of colonization, lonely outposts dotting the vast expanses of the sparsely populated medieval landscape.

Monks and peasants developed relationships because monasteries did not simply hold land, oversee their workers, and take the fruits of their labor with no further interactions. In the demands of normal, everyday life the world "entered" the monastery and the monastery reached out to the world, as Eudes's *Register* also abundantly showed. These relationships and interactions were characterized by reciprocity as well as hierarchy, pointing to larger truths about medieval society: this was not an egalitarian world—it had its distinctions of wealth, birth, and education—but there was great fluidity, a rough and ready quality to life, and a considerable degree of personal independence. A twenty-first-century person must struggle to imagine a world where, in comparison with the present, the state was weak, information storage capabilities were limited, rights of jurisdiction were shared

between a multitude of persons, groups, and principalities, collective and communal activities (as in common field farming, guilds, urban communes, and corporations) were everywhere present, and the possession of land conferred on the possessor rights to govern, to hold courts, to make law. Thinking of such a time and place in terms of elites and commoners, the few and the many, or as a class-based society riven by class warfare (as some historians do), is not the best explanatory mode to employ. The members of one wealth or status group (like monks and nuns) were not isolated from and therefore ignorant of the members of others (like peasants). The complex creations of the Middle Ages, its social fabric, its multifaceted institutions, indeed even the personalities of known individuals, cannot be illuminated by rigid categories. As one historian has observed, "[m]edieval personalities frequently combined sharper extremes of behaviour than appear comprehensible today."[3]

Long-term monk–peasant relations can be investigated, using the records of a number of monasteries that have left good historical archives, by asking what it was that lords and peasants wanted, how their interactions were organized, and how well did they understand one another? Answering those questions will focus on the "food farm" system, monastic estate administration, the tradition of peasant benefactions to monasteries, and monk–peasant relations as revealed in village court records.

THE FOOD FARM SYSTEM

What did a monastic lord want, and what did a peasant want? The two were surprisingly similar: both wanted a well-organized economic structure that would produce a stable, predictable income arriving at fixed and regular intervals to meet the consumption needs of their households. A monastic lord (whose economic rationale is more apparent in the surviving documentation than that of peasants) wanted to know that next year he would receive about the same levels of monies, goods, and services that he had received in the current year and the year before that. Unlike a modern CEO who thinks in terms of maximizing profits over the short-term, and who is willing to move on to a new employer if opportunity beckons, medieval lords and their farming tenants, who were in it together for the long haul, wished to enjoy securely the lands and rights they held, and to avoid disaster in the form of dearth, or even sudden fluctuations in income.[4]

One of the most important early links between the inhabitants of a village or manor and their lord, monastic or otherwise, involved organizing the way in which the lord was supplied with the products of the field. In this system, known as the "food farm," the responsibility for supplying commodities for the lord's consumption

rotated around the various manors of a given lordship (as seen at Cluny). The food would either have to be sent to the lord, or it could be consumed where it was produced: kings, for example, often traveled with their households from one royal manor to another. Over time, all or part of the "food rent" from a particular manor could be commuted to a money payment, giving the lord additional flexibility. The food farm, found in varying and ever-changing forms across all of Europe, appears in the evidence from at least the tenth century.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, sending the food to the lord was the system that was especially characteristic of monastic lordships (as opposed to the estates of bishops and secular princes), because a monastery was an institution with a fairly stable population and daily devotional obligations, like the Divine Office, which required fixed residence. Food and other goods (like oil, cloth, leather, parchment) had to be brought to the community. Individual monks might wander, or be out and about for a variety of reasons, as amply illustrated in these pages, but they could not migrate en masse around their lands, as did secular lords, who moved with their households from one residence to another like a swarm of locusts, consuming the food stores over a period of days or weeks and then moving on. As "undying corporations" whose holdings did not change hands as often as those of secular lords, monasteries could also establish greater continuity in terms of administration, and as communities of literate people they were preeminent among the record-makers and keepers of the Middle Ages, keeping track of what they owed and were owed—and leaving those records for the historian.

In England, the food farm system was well-developed at many monasteries before the Norman Conquest of 1066, as it was at Ramsey Abbey, a wealthy Benedictine monastery located in Cambridgeshire. Founded in 974 and dissolved in 1539, it has left an excellent archive of records for economic, legal, and social historians. The earliest evidence for a food farm at Ramsey Abbey dates to the end of the eleventh century.[5] It was organized manor by manor in units of time, as in a "farm of one day," a "farm of one week," or a "farm of two weeks," meaning that food had to be supplied to the monastery from that manor over that period of time. Like other lords, the abbot and convent of Ramsey knew what manors they held, how many acres of arable, meadow, woodland, and wasteland each manor contained, how much and what kinds of livestock the monastery kept there, and how many tenements were held there for what rents. It was possible to calculate the amounts of renderings in grain, wood, livestock, money rents, and the like that each manor could produce (e.g., using the account records kept by Ramsey Abbey, one historian has determined how many wool fleeces were produced in the year 1361

from about twenty different manors belonging to the monastery).[6] Further, since from the time of Saint Benedict himself it was customary to fix the amount of food and drink that each monk should receive per day (how many cooked dishes, how much bread, how much wine), a community could calculate the size of the grain and other deliveries that were needed to support the community.[7] The food farm system, whether collected in food, money, or a combination of the two, was the life line that stretched over many centuries between village and monastery.

MONASTIC ESTATE ADMINISTRATION

Other well-worn tracks linking monasteries and their tenants can be traced for other communities in many different types of estate administrative records, as in the case of Canterbury Cathedral Priory in south-eastern England. A monastic community was established there with the founding of the first church in 597, made up of the monk-missionaries sent by Pope Gregory the Great to convert the heathen English to Christianity. The monastery survived for nearly 1,000 years until its dissolution under Henry VIII in 1540.[8] Like most monasteries, Canterbury Cathedral Priory did not hold its lands in compact estates; instead, they were scattered in manors of varying sizes across eight English counties. These lands were divided into four administrative units called “wardenships,” each under the control of a “warden,” who was a monk of the community. At first these monk-wardens acted as supervisors, leaving the work of actually directing farming operations on the land to local officials (like the reeve, a man of villein status from that village elected by his fellows to organize the actual farm work on the manor for the lord, and the bailiff, a man of free status chosen by the lord to superintend operations, a sort of “business manager” of the manor). In some periods wardens may have lived on the estates or granges they supervised (like the monks of Eudes’s diocese of Rouen), but usually they were required to maintain residence at their monastery and participate in the Divine Office, like their brother monks. By the end of the thirteenth century the wardens were responsible for collecting all monies and deliveries directly from the manors or vills, and rendering an account each year at the monastery’s exchequer, or financial and accounting office.

Each monk-warden was to make a tour (again, reminiscent of the visitation procedure of Eudes Rigaud) of his “wardenship” twice a year, at Eastertime and around the feast of Saint Michael (September 29), inquiring into the “negligence or diligence” of the reeves and bailiffs. Accompanied by a clerk to keep a record of all necessary information, and grooms to care for his horses, he was otherwise to travel simply, with little or no retinue and armed for safety (expenses

for repairing arrows and buying strings for bows are recorded in the expenses of one of the wardens of Canterbury Cathedral Priory in 1495[9]). Several pocket expense-books have survived that were compiled during such tours, and they reveal numerous points of contact with the monastery's peasant populations: the warden purchased food and drink from them as he traveled, paid to have his horses fed and shod, and received hospitality on each of the manors. He might also pay for candles to be placed on the altars of the parish churches as he and his retinue passed through, gave away small sums of money to the poor, and paid local people for the services he needed as he and his retinue made their journey: barbers, women to wash their laundry, ferrymen when they required river transport, and the like (the expense books also record the tips the wardens paid them).[10] Year after year the monk-warden returned, probably following the same itinerary each time, making the same stops—a predictable point of contact between villagers and the central administration.

PEASANT EMPLOYEES

Monks came to the villagers and villagers also came to the monks. Directly employed by their monastic lord at the abbey itself, peasant "employees" can be glimpsed in a number of different kinds of documents over Ramsey Abbey's long history. People who worked for the abbey are found in a list of witnesses to a set of documents that were issued under Abbot Reginald (r. 1114–1130). They include, after the names of important landholders, the names of abbey servants such as Herbert the constable, Durand the cook, Walter the ostler (stable-keeper), John the mason, Godwin the cordwainer (shoemaker), and Richard the baker. These men were drawn from the farming population of the manors belonging to Ramsey Abbey, as well as the town of Ramsey itself. Another document, dated c. 1200, records the payments to be received by eighty servants of the Abbey. Heading the list is the chaplain, followed by seventy-nine people who serve in humbler domestic capacities: among these are a master porter and servant, a washerwoman for the church, a washerwoman for the refectory, two servants in the infirmary, two cooks for the monks, a scullion (dishwasher), the cellarer's porter, a woodman for the hall, a watchman, an ostler, two master bakers, two boilers, two sweepers in the bakery, five sweepers in the brewery, two master tailors, three servants in the laundry, seven fishermen, a carpenter, a reeve, a pig-keeper, two cattlemen, a mason, the wool merchant with his horse and servant, the winnower with his horse, two gardeners, two orchard-keepers, a miller—and seven almsmen in the guesthouse (poor men who live in the monastery), and fifteen paupers. These servants (and the almsmen and paupers) are paid by food, which they

are either given in the hall or receive as a certain number of loaves of bread, and a wage, which is rendered either as a money payment or as a certain number of acres in one of the Abbey's manors (and when they receive land, this is either in the form of an actual small plot of land which they have for their own use, or the produce from a number of crop-bearing acres of the lord's demesne in one of the abbey's manors). Taken as a group, these payments and renderings amount to more than £4 in money, some 2,000 loaves of bread every two weeks, and about 141 acres located in eighteen different manors. (The chaplain, master porter, woodman for the hall, watchman, and ostler all eat in the hall within the Abbey compound itself.) These men and women are all local people employed by the Abbey.[11]

This long list of occupations, many of which are purely agricultural, serves as a reminder that villagers did not just do such work for the abbot and monks of Ramsey; they also worked in their own households, and for each other. In manorial court records (documents that focus on the village community rather than the Abbey), there are countless distinctive surnames developing in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that point to occupation: in the Ramsey Abbey village of Ellington (Cambridgeshire) a man who may have been serving as a cowherd for the village herds, named Richard Netherde, is cited in the court of 1391 for trespassing, probably with animals (a "neat" is a cow). In another Ramsey Abbey village, Upwood, also in Cambridgeshire, one William Sadeler was fined 30d in 1406 for not delivering to another man five halters "newly made," as he had undertaken to do (a saddler is someone who makes or repairs saddles and other leather goods for use with horses). It is even possible, using account records, to trace some of the people who worked for the Abbey to their home villages, as in the case of Alice Cook who received from the Abbey administration her wages as cook, as noted in Upwood's account roll of 1420–1421. Finally, to take one last—and humorous—example, in Ellington in 1405 a man named John Stale was fined for having a ruinous bake house (a building with an oven in it for baking bread).[12]

PEASANT BENEFACTORS

The tradition of small-scale gifts made by peasants, and the cumulative effects of that tradition over the long-term, are visible in monastic estates everywhere. Thorney Abbey, a Benedictine house founded c. 970 in Cambridgeshire, received extensive land grants from ecclesiastical and secular magnates early in its history, but by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was more dependent for continuing benefactions on modest grants from the local peasantry: for example, Thorney established a daughter-cell at Deeping (Lincolnshire) where a

holding of about fifty acres of arable, attached to that new community, was accumulated from the offerings of thirty people (so each gave on average 1.6 acres of land). One of these gifts was three rods (a rod is a unit of length of 16½ feet) of land from Allured the toll collector to pay for the maintenance of a lamp for the church altar of the tiny community at Deeping. At Thorney's manor at Yaxley, located about ten miles southwest of the abbey, one of the most important benefactors in the thirteenth century was Ascelin "le Gentil" of Peakirk, one of the bailiffs: he gave two rents of 12d each to pay for a lamp to be placed before the statue of the Virgin in the abbey church, one acre of arable in Yaxley, and a further two acres in the village of Woodston.[13]

Fountains Abbey, a Cistercian monastery founded in 1132 in Yorkshire, in northern England, held forty granges by the end of the twelfth century, and lands and rights in nearly 100 other manors.[14] Formation of those granges often began with large gifts of land from wealthy patrons, yet over the abbey's first 100 years and beyond there continued a steady stream of small gifts from peasant donors, sometimes of just one acre, more often two or three, which helped the community build up consolidated holdings with adequate rights of way, access to water or timber resources, and the like. Donor families sometimes continued the tradition of giving to a particular house or to houses in their local area over more than one generation: for example, in the late twelfth century Alan of Arnford gave a small parcel of land to Sawley Abbey (which held lands next to Fountains Abbey's holdings in that village), while lands that he gave his daughter Emma was given by her to Fountains when she was a widow; her sister Raganilda received land from her father Alan when she married, which was later given to Fountains by her son who requested burial at the house; and Peter, the son of Alan, gave land he held in Arnford to Fountains and also requested burial there.[15] Such gifts, leases, or sales, whose variety was also seen in some detail in connection with Godstow Abbey, were often made in return for spiritual benefits. Benefactors might request to be buried in the monastery cemetery, and to have masses said for their souls after death and on the "anniversary" of their death; more simply, many asked that they themselves and their families (and often all good Christians everywhere, as Duke William stated in his foundation charter for Cluny) be included in the daily prayers of the monks. In return for a gift of land or money, these donors became in effect members of the spiritual community centered on that monastic house, its patron saint, its relics, and its church.

Ruins of Fountains Abbey. (Dominic Byrne/Dreamstime.com)

COMMON VALUES

The points of dependence, service, and reciprocity between monk and peasant were clearly numerous and varied. They were also long-term, and in the course of their long history a significant degree of mutual comprehension and a similarity of outlook came into being. The village court records, cited above, are part of the mass of administrative records produced by the monastic administration, but they have the special quality of providing a bird's-eye view, at the village level, of this long-standing association between monasteries and their tenants. Only a few citations can be given here from this immense treasure trove of evidence.[16]

To some extent, because the Abbot was a landholder in the village, alongside his peasant tenants, he could be treated very much like them when it came to infringing local bylaws governing the maintenance of common roads, paths, and waterways. In the court records for Upwood, between 1375 and 1456, the Abbot of Ramsey, like any other tenant, was cited and fined eight times for not cleaning his ditches, for damaging ditches, and consequently flooding the road.[17] That lord and tenant had common local interests is illustrated in the Upwood court record of 1313, where it is noted that the encroachment of another lord's woodland on Upwood's arable constitutes a "disinheritance of the lord and his tenants," that is, it is causing damage to the landed interests of both the monastery and its peasants.[18]

These brief, routine citations that give a glimpse of normal, everyday

affairs can also suggest the assumptions that lay behind them. In the court record of 1306 for Ellington, there is a series of entries under the heading of "licences," referring to a number of villager activities that required the lord's special permission, such as license to be outside the manor, and license to practice the trade of butcher and tanner. One of these entries states that "by his special grace," the lord Abbot of Ramsey grants permission to Robert, son of Geoffrey Buk and to John, son of William Buk to take holy orders, "at least to the first tonsure." In effect, he is granting them permission to leave the village (which means that they are from families of villein or unfree status), study, and enter the ranks of the clergy, and in return the Abbot asks that they pray for his soul.[19]

In that same court record it is noted that by his permission and "special grace" and at the urging of Robert, the local parish priest, Abbot Simon granted "letters to study and to take up first tonsure" to another villager, whose name is given as Nicholas son of John son of Sarra of Sibthorpe (a small hamlet within the village of Ellington).[20] Not much else is known about Nicholas, John, or Sarra, other than that Sarra must have been long-lived (historians believe that the construction "X son of X" was used in the records only if the parent—or in this case the grandparent—was still alive). Perhaps she played a role in establishing a connection between her grandson and the local priest who acted as Nicholas's sponsor and urged the lord to grant his request. Similarly, in 1329 two other sons of villein families, Simon (whose surname in the manuscript is illegible) and William Walter, were permitted to proceed "to first tonsure," and the court record specifically states that this grant appears in a "licence of the lord which is in Simon's possession" (actually, literally, "in Simon's hand").[21] This entry is particularly interesting in revealing the conveying of a document from the abbey administration to a villager. A careful reading of the many different types of records generated by the administrative office of a monastery reveal many such points of contact and common outlook; at the very least, they attest to the variety and utter normality of monk–peasant associations.

Monasteries were religious communities that disengaged from "the world" in varying degrees, but they were also colonizers of land and technological innovators, landlords, employers, educators and book makers, consumers and producers for market, holders of rights of jurisdiction. These were completely ordinary aspects of monastic reality, many of them in place from early times. It is no surprise that monasteries loomed so large in the landscape of medieval Europe, for they possessed and wielded power and resources in terms of land, power, education, and religion—a far cry from the shabby huts and abandoned military forts that housed the first monks and nuns in

Egypt in the days of the Roman Empire. Like so much else in medieval civilization, these were institutions that were built to last over the long haul; yet today, while medieval lordship has passed away, as have the manors and, for the most part, the monasteries, the villages remain. These were created by a human settlement, a community of peasant families, whose culture and way of life emerged very often within the framework of monastic lordship.

NOTES

1. "Life of Saint Anthony," in *A Short Reader of Medieval Saints*, ed. Mary-Ann Stouck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 31–2.
2. "Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow," in *The Age of Bede*, trans. J. F. Webb, ed. D. H. Farmer (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 194–5.
3. Sandra Raban, *The Estates of Thorney and Crowland: A Study in Medieval Monastic Land Tenure* (Cambridge: Department of Land Economy, Occasional Paper No. 7, 1977), p. 46. The meaning of this remark echoes that of another historian quoted in the Introduction (above, p. xxxiv), that the monastic regime may have the effect of sharpening and strengthening the individuality of those who live there.
4. A challenging and excellent article that explores these issues is D. McCloskey, "English Open Fields as Behavior towards Risk," *Research in Economic History* 1 (Fall 1976): 124–70; reprinted in Stephen Ziliak, *Measurement and Meaning in Economics* (Northampton, MA: E. Elgar, 2001), pp. 124–70.
5. J. Ambrose Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey: A Study in Economic Growth and Organization* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1957), pp. 34–5.
6. Raftis, *Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, p. 152, Table XXXII.
7. For this discussion of the food farm at Ramsey, see Raftis, *Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, pp. 76–7.
8. This discussion is based on R.A.L. Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory: A Study in Monastic Administration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), Chapter 7.
9. Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory*, p. 104, note 8.
10. Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory*, p. 105.
11. For these two documents and this discussion, see Raftis, *Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, pp. 51–2 and notes 108 and 109.
12. For these references and a fuller discussion see Sherri Olson, *A Chronicle of All That Happens: Voices from the Village Court in Medieval England* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), p. 14.
13. Raban, *Estates of Thorney and Crowland*, pp. 38–9.
14. Joan Wardrop, *Fountains Abbey and its Benefactors, 1132–1300* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), p. 220.
15. Wardrop, *Fountains Abbey*, pp. 111–13, 225–6, 233, Chapter 5 generally.
16. Village or manorial court rolls survive, beginning in the late thirteenth century, for hundreds of English villages. They are among the best evidence the historian has for investigating village life and peasant culture in the high and later Middle Ages.
17. For this citation and a fuller discussion see Olson, *A Chronicle*, p. 185.
18. Olson, *A Chronicle*, p. 26.
19. Olson, *A Chronicle*, p. 25
20. Sherri Olson, "Women's Place and Women's Space in the Medieval Village," in *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 209–25, at 224–5.
21. Sherri Olson, *A Mute Gospel: The People and Culture of the Medieval English Common Fields* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), p. 134.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

abbot, abbess—the head of a monastery
almoner—monastic officer in charge of dispensing charity to the poor
anchoretic monasticism—form of monasticism involving solitary withdrawal from the world; in the high Middle Ages this often involved being walled up in a small cell adjoining a church. The person so enclosed was called an **anchorite** (fem. **anchoress**)
apostasy—to abandon one's faith or religious commitment; to quit a religious order or renounce vows without permission
Arianism, Arian Christianity—an early Christian heresy that denied the full divinity of Jesus
armarium—(Latin) cabinet, closet, bookcase, hence library
asceticism—self-abnegation, denial of the body to feed the life of the spirit
bailiff—chief official or agent of the lord on a manor
bishop—the chief priest of an ecclesiastical administrative unit called the diocese
Black Death—bubonic plague that swept across Europe and the Mediterranean, in the sixth century and in the fourteenth century
burgage tenement—a piece of land or a tenement in a town or city, held for rent
Byzantium—the eastern Roman Empire that survived the fall of the western half, centered on the city of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey)
canon regular—a cleric who lives in the world and serves the laity, yet is a member of a religious community bound by quasi-monastic rules
canoness—a woman who lives in a religious community but is not bound by irrevocable monastic vows
cantor, cantress—the chief singer in the monastic choir who leads in song during the Divine Office
cartulary—a collection of the charters or deeds of a monastic house that records transactions, gifts, and holdings
cathedral clergy—the priests attached to the service of a cathedral church, the chief church of a diocese
cellarer—the monk in charge of the kitchen and food supplies in the monastery
cenobitic monasticism—"common life" monasticism, community life, as opposed to eremitic monasticism or living as a solitary
chancel—the eastern part of a church that contained the altar, usually

reserved for the clergy and kept separate from the areas open to the laity

chapter house—the place for the regular meetings of the monastic community, where a "chapter" of Benedict's *Rule* or Cassian's *Institutes* was read

chronicle—a narrative account of historical events

circatores—(Latin) those who make the rounds in the monastery to make sure that all members are appropriately occupied in monastic duties

Cistercian Order—a reform-oriented monastic order founded in France in the late eleventh century, known for its austerity

clergy, regular—monastic clerics, those who live according to a rule (Latin *regula*)

clergy, secular—clergy who live in the world and minister to the sacramental needs of the laity (e.g., parish priests, bishops, popes)

cloister—(adj. claustral) rectangular open space surrounded by covered walks within a monastic compound

collegiate church—a church where the priests who serve the surrounding population live in a semimonastic community, keeping the monastic round of daily prayers

Compline—the last of the seven daily prayer services, recited just before going to bed

corrody—an allowance of food, drink, and lodging given to someone in exchange for a gift of money or land to a monastery, or such an allowance given to a servant; a **corrodian** is a person who holds a corrody

dean—a member of the groups of ten or so officials to be appointed, according to Saint Benedict, to help govern and administer the community

decury, decanal system, decanate—the system of deans in a monastery; the body of officers so formed

demesne—the lands of a manor that are cultivated for the benefit of the lord

diocese—an ecclesiastical territory and unit of administration headed by a bishop

Divine Office—(Latin *opus Dei*, the work of God) the program of seven daytime services and one nighttime service when the community comes together for prayer

eremiticism, eremitic monasticism—"hermit" monasticism, solitary monastic life

Eucharist—(Greek, to bestow grace) the sacrament in which a priest blesses bread and wine which become, according to Christian belief, the very body and blood of Jesus

excommunication—a formal sentence of exclusion from the rites of

the Church
exorcist—a person who drives demons out of someone who is possessed; a clerical order or rank below that of a priest
extreme unction—(last rites) the sacrament involving prayers and rituals that is administered to a person on his or her deathbed
flagellation—a form of discipline to mortify the flesh, involving beating oneself, or being beaten, with a whip
food farm—a system whereby responsibility for sending provisions for the lord's consumption (usually a monastic community) rotated between the different manors of that lordship
Franciscans—a mendicant (i.e., begging) order of lay Christians, founded by Saint Francis in the early thirteenth century, that soon became clericalized
friar—(Latin, *frater*, brother) a member of a mendicant order, such as the Franciscans
Gaul—an area corresponding roughly to what is modern-day France that was a province of the Roman Empire
grange—(Latin, *grangia*, barn) an administrative unit of a lord's estate centered on the resources and buildings needed for farming operations; in the case of a monastic lord, like Cluny, granges were also often equipped with a refectory, dormitory, chapel, cloister, and guest room
herbal, herbarium—a book that lists various herbs, their appearance and properties
hermit—(Greek, *eremia*, desert) a solitary who withdraws in seclusion from the world
homily—a simple, practical sermon, usually based on a Scriptural passage
infirmary—the room or area in a monastic compound where the sick are cared for
Lauds—the daytime prayer sung at dawn
layman, laity—people who are not in holy orders, the nonclerical majority
legate—an emissary or agent who represents the interests of the person or office that sent him (e.g., a legate of the pope)
leprosary, leper house—special hospice or compound set aside to care for those afflicted with leprosy
liturgy—the prescribed forms for public worship
Lombards—the last of the "Germanic" invaders who entered Italy in 568
Magyars—Turkic, seminomadic invaders who were defeated by the German king in 955, settled in Hungary, and converted to Christianity
Matins—see **Night Office**
medicinal discipline—actions performed as a penance to atone for

one's sins and to heal oneself from the damage done by sin
monk—a man who undertakes a life of asceticism in his quest for salvation
Night Office—(also called Nocturns, Vigils, Matins) the longest of the eight prayer services in the Divine Office, held at 2 or 3 a.m.
Nocturns—see **Night Office**
Normans—the people of Normandy, a duchy in northern France based on a Viking settlement made there in the early tenth century
nun—a woman who undertakes a life of asceticism in her quest for salvation
obit—(Latin, *obire*, to die) a special memorial service held on the anniversary of a person's death
oblation—(Latin, *oblatus*, offered) the practice of "offering" a child to a monastery to be raised and educated and ultimately received there, usually accompanied by a gift of land or money
opus Dei—(Latin, the work of God) see **Divine Office**
oratory—(Latin, *orare*, to pray) a place of prayer
ordained clergy—clerics who have received holy orders by the sacrament of ordination, and thus become ministers of the church
Ostrogoths—Germanic invaders who occupied Italy during the era of invasions and established a short-lived kingdom there
parchment—animal skin prepared and treated so as to provide a writing surface
parish priest—a cleric who celebrates the sacraments in the church of a parish, the smallest unit of ecclesiastical administration, often corresponding to a village
parochial Mass—the Mass or Eucharist celebrated in a parish church
paten—a flat dish or plate on which the host or consecrated bread is placed during the Eucharist
pittance—a special meal or dish (usually fish or eggs) given by a benefactor to a monastery to treat the members of the community, in return for special prayers or services
precentor—see **cantor**
priory—a small, often dependent, monastic community headed by a prior (Latin, first) appointed by the abbot of a larger house
procuration—the right to food, lodging, and provision for horses, enjoyed by the cleric who comes to inspect ("visit") a monastery; sometimes rendered in money rather than actual goods
refectory—the room or hall in which the members of a monastic community take their meals
register—a book or collection of copies of letters sent out and other official documents that relate to the administrative functions of an office or official (as in a bishop's register)
relic—a body part or an object associated with Jesus or one of the

saints (like a splinter of wood from the Cross on which Jesus was crucified) that is venerated and believed to transmit a kind of sacred power

reliquary—a special case that holds a relic, sometimes in the shape of the relic itself (like the arm of Saint Phillip)

Saracen—a vague term of uncertain origin used by medieval Europeans to indicate people from the East

scapular—a monastic article of clothing, a sleeveless tunic that falls from the shoulders

scriptorium—the writing office of a monastery, usually located in or near the library or armarium

tithing—another term for the decury or decanal system (see **dean** and **decury**)

vellum—calf-skin treated and prepared to provide a writing surface

Vespers—the last prayer service of the Divine Office, in the evening, before Compline and bed

vestiary—a room or closet in the monastery where clothing is kept

vigil—the evening before a feast or holy day (like the vigil of Easter), often marked by special devotional observances

Vigils—see **Night Office**

Vikings—invaders from Scandinavia who plundered and terrorized European populations from the eighth to the tenth centuries

villein—a peasant tenant of unfree or semifree status; **villeinage** refers to customary tenure, that is, the established rents, services, and renderings in kind that a villein owes his or her lord

Visigoths—a wave of Germanic invaders who settled in the Iberian peninsula in the fifth century and established a kingdom there that survived until the Muslim invasions of the eighth century

visitation—the formal visitation of a monastic or other religious community, usually made by the bishop of the diocese where it is located

vita—(Latin, life) a biography, usually of a holy person

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About the Author

SHERRI OLSON, PhD, is an associate professor of history and codirector of the medieval studies program at the University of Connecticut. Her published works include *A Chronicle of All That Happens: Voices from the Village Court in Medieval England* and *A Mute Gospel: The People and Culture of the Medieval English Common Fields.* Olson holds a doctorate from the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto.